

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

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## BLACK SHEEP!

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LAND AT LAST," "KISSING THE ROD," &c. &c.

### CHAPTER IX. TIDED OVER.

It was the fourth morning after George Dallas's arrival in Amherst, the day on which his mother had appointed by letter for him to go over to Poynings, and there receive that which was to set him free from the incubus of debt and difficulty which had so long oppressed him. An anticipation of pleasure crossed his mind so soon as he first opened his eyes; he soon remembered whence the satisfaction sprang, and on going to the window and looking out, he found that nature and he were once again in accord. As at the time of his misery she had worn her blackest garb, her direst expression, so now, when hope seemed to gleam upon him, did nature don her flowery robes and array herself in her brightest verdant sheen. Spring was rapidly ripening into summer; into the clean and comely little town, which itself was radiant with whitened door-steps, and newly painted woodwork, and polished brass fittings, came wafted delicious odours from outlying gardens and uplands, where the tossing grass went waving to and fro like the undulations of a restless sea, and in the midst of which the sturdy old farm-houses, dotted here and there, stood out like red-faced islands. Dust, which even the frequent April showers could not lay, was blowing in Amherst streets; blinds, which had been carefully laid by during the winter (the Amherst mind had scarcely arrived at spring blinds for outside use, and contented itself with modest striped sacking, fastened between hooks on the shop fronts, and poles socketed into the pavement), were brought forth and hung up in all the glory of cleanliness. It was reported by those who had been early astir, that Tom Leigh, the mail-cart driver, had been seen with his white hat on that morning, and any Amherstian who may have previously doubted whether the fine weather had actually arrived, must have been flinty-hearted and obdurate indeed not to have accepted that assurance.

The sunshine and the general brightness of the day had its due effect on George Dallas, who was young, for a nineteenth-century man

almost romantic, and certainly impressible. His spirits rose within him, as, his breakfast finished, he started off to walk to Poynings. Drinking in the loveliness of the broad sun-steeped landscape, the sweet odours coming towards him on the soft breeze, the pleasant sound, were it chink of blacksmith's hammer, or hum of bees, or voice of cuckoo hidden deep in distant bright-leaved woods, the young man for a time forgot his baser associations and seemed to rise, in the surroundings of the moment, to a better and purer frame of mind than he had known for many years. Natural, under such circumstances, was the first turning of his thoughts to his mother, to whose deep love and self-sacrifice he was indebted for the freedom which at length was about to be his. In his worst times there had been one bright spot of love for her in all the black folly of his life, and now the recollection of her disinterestedness and long suffering on his behalf made her as purely dear to him as when, in the old days that seemed so long ago, he had said his prayers at her knee. He recollected walking with her in their garden on mornings like these, when they were all in all to each other, soon after his father's death, when that chastening memory was on them both, and before there was any thought of Mr. Carruthers or his niece—or his niece!—and straightway off went his thoughts into a different channel. What a pretty girl! so soft and quiet, so fresh withal, and frank, and guileless, so different to—Well, he didn't know; with similar advantages Harriet might have been very much the same. But Miss Carruthers was certainly specially charming; the talk which they had had together showed that. The talk which they had together? Was he not entering her own domain? What if she were to meet and recognise him there? That would spoil all their plans. A word from her would—oh no! Though Mrs. Carruthers might not have been intended as a conspirator by nature, George felt by his recent experience of his mother's movements that she would have sufficient foresight to prevent Clare from leaving the house just at that time, lest she might discover the rendezvous in the shrubbery. The tact that had so rapidly shifted the venue of their last meeting from the bustle of the draper's to the calm solitude of the dentist's would assuredly be sufficient to prevent a young girl from intruding on their next appointment.

Busy with these thoughts, and ever and anon pausing to look round him at the fair scenes through which he was passing, George Dallas pursued his way along the high road until he gained the summit of the little hill whence is obtained the first view of Poynings and its grounds. There he stopped suddenly; from that point he had always intended to reconnoitre, but he had never anticipated seeing what he did see—a carriage driving through the open lodge gates, and in the carriage reclining at his ease no less a person than Mr. Capel Carruthers. It was he, not a doubt about it, in the respectability of his glossy broad-brimmed hat, in his white whiskers, in his close-fitting dogskin gloves, in the very double-gold eyeglass with which he was looking at nature in a very patronising manner. Even if he had not been short-sighted, Mr. Carruthers was at such a distance as would utterly have prevented him from recognising any one on the top of the hill; but George Dallas no sooner saw him than instinctively he crouched down by the hedge-side and waited until the carriage was rolling down the avenue; then he slowly raised himself, muttering:

"What the deuce has brought him back just now? confound him! What on earth will she do? It's most infernally provoking, just at this very nick of time; he might have kept off a few hours longer. She won't come to the shrubbery now; she's frightened out of her life at that old ruffian, and, by George, I shall be put off again! After all I've said to Routh, after all the castles in the air which I've been building on the chance of getting free, I shall have to slink back to town empty-handed!" He was leaning over a gate in the hedge, and as he spoke he shook his fist at the unconscious county magistrate, visible in the distance now but by the crown of his hat. "Except," continued George, "knowing how deeply I'm involved, she'll risk all hazards and come to the shrubbery. Perhaps she's started now, not expecting him, and when he reaches the house and doesn't find her there—he's always hanging on her trail, curse him!—he will make inquiries and follow her. That would be worst of all, for not only should I miss what she promised me, but she would come to grief herself, poor darling. Well, I must chance it, whatever happens."

He turned down a by-lane which ran at right angles to the avenue, pursuing which he came upon a low park paling enclosing the shrubbery. Carefully looking round him, and finding no one within sight, he climbed the paling, and dropped noiselessly upon the primrose-decked bank on the other side. All quiet; nothing moving but the birds darting in and out among the bright green trees, and the grasshoppers in myriads round his feet. The walk had tired him, and he lay down on the mossy turf and awaited his mother's coming. Mossy turf, soft and sweet-smelling, the loud carol of the birds, the pleasant, soothing, slumberous sound of the trees bending gently towards each other as the mild air rustled

in the leaves. It was long since he had experienced these influences, but he was now under their spell. What did they recal? Boyhood's days; the Bishop's Wood, where they went birds'-nesting; Duke Primus, who won "stick-ups," and was the cock of the school, and Charley Cope, who used to tell such good stories in bed, and Bergemann, a German boy, who was drowned in a pond in just such a part of the wood as this, and—twelve o'clock rings sharply out from the turret clock in Poynings stables, and at its sound away fly the ghosts of the past. Twelve o'clock, the time appointed in his mother's letter for him to meet her in that very spot. He rose up from the turf, and sheltering himself behind the broad trunk of an old tree, looked anxiously in the direction of the house. No human being was to be seen; a few rabbits whisked noiselessly about, their little white tails gleaming as they disappeared in the brushwood, but they and the birds and the grasshoppers comprised all the life about the place. He looked on the big trees and the chequered shade between them, and the glimpses of blue skylight between their topmost boughs; he left his vantage ground and strode listlessly to and fro; the quarter chime rang out from the turret, then the half hour, and still no one came.

Some one coming at last! George Dallas's quick eyes make out a female figure in the far distance, not his mother, though. This woman's back is bowed, her step slow and hesitating, unlike Mrs. Carruthers, on whose matronly beauty Time has as yet laid his gentlest touch. He must stand aside, he thought, amongst the trees until the new comer had passed by; but as the woman approached, her gait and figure seemed familiar to him, and when she raised her head and looked round her as though expecting some one, he recognised Nurse Brookes. The old woman gave a suppressed scream as George Dallas stepped out from among the trees and stood before her.

"I could not help it, George," said she; "I could not help it, though I was looking for and expecting you at that moment, and that's more than you were doing for me, isn't it? You were expecting some one else, my boy?"

"Is anything the matter? Is she ill? Has her husband found out?"

"Nothing! She's—well, as well as may be, poor dear, and——"

"Then she hasn't been able to do what she promised?"

"Oh, George, George, did you ever know her fail in doing what she promised, from the days when you were a baby until now? Better for her, poor thing, as I've often told her, if she hadn't——"

"Yes, yes, nurse, I know all about that, of course; but why isn't she here now?"

"She daren't come, George. Master's come home unexpected, and he and Miss Clare are with her, and there is no chance for her to make an excuse to get away. So she just runs into her dressing-room for a minute,

and sends to me—she always sends to me in her troubles, as you've seen many a time and oft, Master George—and tells me, she says, 'Take this and go into the shrubbery, and tell George,' she says, 'why I couldn't come, and that I sent it him with my heart's love, and God bless him,' she says."

As the old woman spoke, she produced from her pocket a round flat parcel wrapped in writing-paper, which she handed to Dallas. He took it with a very weak attempt at unconcern (he did not know with how much of their secret his mother might have entrusted the old nurse), and thrust it into his breast-pocket, saying at the same time, "Thanks, nurse. That's all right. Did she say anything else?"

"Nothing, I think. Oh yes—that of course now you would not remain in the neighbourhood, and that you were to be sure to write to her, and send your address."

"She need not be afraid—I'm off at once! Good-bye, nurse. Tell my mother I'll hold to all I promised her. Thank her a thousand times, bless her! Good-bye, dear old woman; perhaps the next time we meet I shan't have to skulk in a wood when I want to see my mother!"

He pressed a hasty kiss on the old woman's upturned face, and hurried away. The last sound he had uttered seemed to have rekindled the old vindictive feeling in his mind, for as he strode away he muttered to himself: "Skulking in a wood, hiding behind trees—a pretty way for a son to seek his mother, and she never to come after all! Prevented by her fear of that pompous idiot, her husband. To think of her, such as I recollect her, being afraid of an empty-headed dotard. And yet he is kind to her. She said so herself—that's nothing; but Nurse Brookes said so too—that's something—that's everything. If he were not—if he treated her badly—he should rue it. But he is fond of her, and proud of her, as well he may be; and Clare, that charming girl, is his niece. Charming, indeed! Ah, Capel Carruthers, you have a wholesome horror of me, but you little know that two guardian angels plead for you!"

The sight of the park paling over which he had climbed into the shrubbery, and over which lay his only way out of it, seemed to change the tenor of his thoughts. He stopped at once, and looking cautiously round, stepped in among the trees, and drew from his breast the packet which Nurse Brookes had given to him. He tore off the outer covering of writing-paper, and carefully placed it in his pocket, then he came to a purple morocco case, which he opened, and there before him, set off by the velvet on which it lay, was the bracelet, a band of dead gold, set with splendid wreaths of forget-me-nots in diamonds and turquoises. George Dallas took it up and examined it attentively, weighed it in his hand, looked closely at the stones in various lights, then replaced it in its case, as a smile of satisfaction spread over his face.

"No mistake about that!" said he. "Even

I, all unaccustomed to such luxuries, know that this must be the right thing. She has sent it as she received it, in the very box, with the swell Bond-street jeweller's name and all! Not a bad notion of a present, Mr. Carruthers, by any means. You've money, sir; but, it must be owned, you've taste also. It's only to be hoped that you've not very sharp eyesight, or that you'll ever be tempted to make a very close inspection of the Palais Royal bijouterie which is doing duty for this in the jewel-box! These will set me clear with Routh, and leave me with a few pounds in my pocket besides, to begin life anew with. If it does that, and I can stick to my employment on The Mercury, and get a little more work somewhere else, and give up that infernal card-playing—that's the worst of it—I may yet make our friend C. C. believe I am not such a miserable scoundrel as he now imagines me!"

He replaced the case carefully in his breast-pocket, climbed the palings, and was once more on the high road, striding in the direction of Amherst. Ah, the castle-building, only occasionally interrupted by a return to the realities of life in squeezing the packet in his breast-pocket, which he indulged in during that walk! Free, with the chance and the power of making a name for himself in the world! free from all the debasing associations, free from Routh, from Harriet—from Harriet? Was that idea quite so congenial to his feelings? to be separated from Harriet, the only woman whom, in his idle dissipated days, he had ever regarded with anything like affection, the only woman who—and then the bright laughing face and the golden hair of Clare Carruthers rose before his mind. How lovely she was, how graceful and bred-looking, above all, how fresh and youthful, how unsullied by any contact with the world, with all the native instincts pure and original, with no taught captivations or society charms, nothing but—

"Yoho! Yoho!"

George Dallas started from his reverie at the repeated cry, and only just in time sprang from the middle of the road along which, immersed in thought, he had been plodding, as the mail-cart, with its red-faced driver, a sprig of lilac in his breast and a bunch of laburnum behind each ear of his horse, came charging full upon him. The driver was a man choleric by nature and with a great sense of his position as an important government officer, and he glared round at George and asked him a few rapid questions, in which the devil and his supposed residence were referred to with great volubility. Under less pleasant circumstances Dallas would probably have returned his greeting with interest; as it was, he merely laughed, and, waving his hand, proceeded on his way to the inn, whence, having paid his bill, he returned to London by the first train.

During the whole of the journey up to town the young man's thoughts were filled with his intentions for the future, and no sooner had the train stopped at London-bridge than he deter-

mined to go at once to The Mercury office and announce his readiness to undertake any amount of work. Accordingly he struck away across the Borough, and, crossing Blackfriars-bridge, dived among a mass of streets running at right angles with Fleet-street, until he arrived at a large, solemn, squat old building, over the door of which glimmered a lamp with the words "Mercury Office" in half-effaced characters. A smart pull at a sharp, round, big bell brought a preternaturally sharp boy to the door, who at once recognised the visitor and admitted him within the sacred precincts. Up a dark passage, up a steep and regular flight of stairs, George Dallas proceeded, until on the first floor he rapped at the door facing him, and, being bidden to come in, entered the editorial sanctum.

A large cheerless room, its floor covered with a ragged old Turkey carpet, on its walls two or three bookshelves crammed with books of reference, two or three maps, an old clock gravely ticking, and a begrimed bust, with its hair dust-powdered, and with layers of dust on its highly developed cheek-bones. In the middle of the room a battered old desk covered with blue books, letters opened and unopened, piles of manuscript under paper-weights, baskets with cards of invitation for all sorts of soirées, entertainments, and performances, and snake-like india-rubber tubes for communication with distant printing offices or reporters' rooms, a big leaden inkstand like a bath, and a sheaf of pens more or less dislocated. At this desk sat a tall man of about fifty, bald-headed, large-bearded, with sharp grey eyes, well-cut features, and good presence. This was Mr. Leigh, editor of The Mercury; a man who had been affiliated to the press from the time of his leaving college, who had been connected with nearly all the morning journals in one capacity or another, correspondent here, manager there, descriptive writer, leader-writer, critic, and scrub, and who, always rising, had been recommended by the Jupiter Tonans of the press, the editor of The Statesman, to fill the vacant editorial chair at The Mercury. A long-headed, far-seeing man, Grafton Leigh, bright as a diamond, and about as hard, keen as a sword in the hands of a fine fencer, and as difficult to turn aside, earnest, energetic, devoted to his work, and caring for nothing else in comparison—not even for his wife, then sound asleep in his little house in Brompton, or his boy working for his exhibition from Westminster. He looked up as George entered, and his features, tightly set, relaxed as he recognised the young man.

"You, Ward!" said he. "We didn't look for you till to-morrow night. What rush of industry, what sudden desire to distinguish yourself, has brought you here to-night, my boy?"

Before George could answer, a young man came forward from an inner room, and caught him by the hand.

"What Paul, old fellow, this is delicious! He must be brimming over with ideas, Chief, and has come down here to ventilate them."

"Not I," said George. "My dear Chief," addressing Leigh, "both you and Cunningham give me credit for more virtue than I possess. I merely looked in as I passed from the railway, to see how things were going on."

"This is a sell," said Mr. Cunningham. "I thought I had booked you. You see that confounded Shimmer has failed us again. He was to have done us a sensation leader on the murder—"

"The murder! What murder?"

"Oh, ah, I forgot; happened since you went away. Wapping or Rotherhithe—some water-side place—body found, and all that kind of thing! Shimmer was to have done us one of his stirrers, full of adjectives, denouncing the supineness of the police, and that kind of thing, and he's never turned up, and the Chief has kept me here to fill his place. Confounded nuisance! I'm obliged to fall back on my old subject—Regulation of the City Traffic!"

"I'm very sorry for you, Cunningham," said George, laughing; "but I can't help you to-night. I'm seedy and tired, and I know nothing about the murder, and want to get to bed. However, I came to tell the Chief that I'm his now and for ever, ready to do double tasks of work from to-morrow out."

"All right, Ward. So long as you don't overdo it, I shall always be delighted to have you with us," said Mr. Leigh. "Now get home to bed, for you look dog-tired." And George Dallas shook hands with each, and went away.

"Glad to hear we're going to have a good deal of work out of Ward, Chief," said Cunningham, when he and his editor were alone again. "He's deuced smart when he likes—as smart as Shimmer, and a great deal more polished and gentlemanly."

"Yes," said Grafton Leigh, "he's a decided catch for the paper. I don't think his health will last, though. Did you notice his manner to-night?—nerves agitated and twitching, like a man who had gone through some great excitement!"

#### CHAPTER X. DISPOSED OF.

It was very late when George Dallas arrived at Routh's lodgings in South Molton-street, so that he felt it necessary to announce his presence by a peculiar knock, known only to the initiated. He made the accustomed signal, but the door was not opened for so abnormally long an interval that he began to think he should have to go away, and defer the telling of the good news until the morning. He had knocked three times, and was about to turn away from the door, when it was noiselessly opened by Harriet herself. She held a shaded candle in her hand, which gave so imperfect a light that Dallas could hardly see her distinctly enough to feel certain that his first impression, that she was looking very pale and ill, was not an imagination induced by the dim light. She asked him to come into the sitting-room, and said she had just turned the gas out, and was going to bed.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said,



when she had set down the candle on a table, without re-lighting the gas, "but I want to see Routh particularly. Is he in?"

"No," said Harriet, "he is not. Did you get his letter?"

"What letter? I have not heard from him. I have only just come up from Amherst. But you look ill, Mrs. Routh. Does anything ail you? Is anything wrong?"

"No," she said, hurriedly, "nothing, nothing. Routh has been worried, that's all, and I am very tired."

She pushed the candle further away as she spoke, and, placing her elbow on the table, rested her head on her hand. George looked at her with concern. He had a kind heart and great tenderness for women and children, and he could forget, or, at all events, lay aside his own anxieties in a moment at the sight of suffering in a woman's face. His look of anxious sympathy irritated Harriet; she moved uneasily and impatiently, and said almost harshly:

"Never mind my looks, Mr. Dallas; they don't matter. Tell me how you have sped on your errand at Poynings. Has your mother kept her promise? Have you got the money? I hope so, for I am sorry to say Stewart wants it badly, and has been reckoning on it eagerly. I can't imagine how it happened you did not get his letter."

"I have succeeded," said George. "My mother has kept her word, God bless her, and I came at once to tell Routh he can have the money."

He stopped in the full tide of his animated speech, and looked curiously at Harriet. Something in her manner struck him as being unusual. She was evidently anxious about the money, glad to see him, and yet oddly absent. She did not look at him, and while he spoke she had turned her head sharply once or twice, while her upraised eyelids and parted lips gave her face a fleeting expression of intense listening. She instantly noticed his observation of her, and said sharply:

"Well, pray go on; I am longing to hear your story."

"I thought you were listening to something; you looked as if you heard something," said George.

"So I am listening—to you," Harriet replied, with an attempt at a smile. "So I do hear your adventures. There's nobody up in the house but myself. Pray go on."

So George went on, and told her all that had befallen him at Amherst, with one important reservation; he said nothing of Clare Carruthers or his two meetings with the heiress at the Sycamores; but he told her all about his interview with his mother, and the expedient to which she had resorted to supply his wants. Harriet Routh listened to his story intently; but when she heard that he had received from Mrs. Carruthers, not money, but jewels, she was evidently disconcerted.

"Here is the bracelet," said George, as he took the little packet from the breast-pocket of

his coat, and handed it to her. "I don't know much about such things, Mrs. Routh, but perhaps you do. Are the diamonds very valuable?"

Harriet had opened the morocco case containing the bracelet while he was speaking, and now she lifted the beautiful ornament from its satin bed, and held it on her open palm.

"I am not a very capable judge," she said; "but I think these are fine and valuable diamonds. They are extremely beautiful." And a gleam of colour came into her white face as she looked at the gems with a woman's irrepressible admiration of such things.

"I can't tell you how much I feel taking them from her," said George. "It's like a robbery, isn't it?" And he looked full and earnestly at Harriet.

She started, let the bracelet fall, stooped to pick it up, and as she raised her face again, it was whiter than before.

"How can you talk such nonsense?" she said, with a sudden resumption of her usual captivating manner. "Of course it isn't. Do you suppose your mother ever had as much pleasure in these gewgaws in her life as she had in giving them to you? Besides, you know you're going to reform and be steady, and take good advice, are you not?" She watched him very keenly, though her tone was gay and trifling. George reddened, laughed awkwardly, and replied:

"Well, I hope so; and the first step, you know, is to pay my debts. So I must get Routh to put me in the way of selling this bracelet at once. I suppose there's no difficulty about it. I'm sure I have heard it said that diamonds are the same as ready money, and the sooner the tin is in Routh's pocket the better pleased I'll be. None the less obliged to him, though, Mrs. Routh; remember that, both for getting me out of the scrape, and for waiting so long and so good-humouredly for his money."

For all the cordiality of his tone, for all the gratitude he expressed, Harriet felt in her inmost heart, and told herself she felt, that he was a changed man; that he felt his freedom, rejoiced in it, and did not mean again to relinquish or endanger it.

"The thing he feared has happened," she thought, while her small white fingers were busy with the jewels. "The very thing he feared. This man must be got away—how am I to do it?"

The solitary candle was burning dimly; the room was dull, cold, and gloomy. George looked round, and was apparently thinking of taking his leave, when Harriet said:

"I have not told you how opportune your getting this money—for I count it as money—is. Stay; let me light the gas. Sit down there opposite to me, and you shall hear how things have gone with us since you went away." She had thrown off the abstraction of her manner, and in a moment she lighted the gas, put the extinguished candle out of sight, set wine upon the table, and pulled a comfortable arm-chair forward, in which she begged George to seat

himself. "Take off your coat," she said; and he obeyed her, telling her, with a laugh, as he flung it upon a chair, that there was a small parcel of soiled linen in the pocket.

"I did not expect to have to stay at Amherst, so I took no clothes with me," he explained, "and had to buy a shirt and a pair of stockings for Sunday, so as not to scandalise the natives. Rather an odd place to replenish one's wardrobe, by-the-by."

Harriet looked sharply at the coat, and, passing the chair on which it lay on her way to her own, felt its texture with a furtive touch. Then she sat down, gave Dallas wine, and once more fell to examining the bracelet. It might have occurred to any other man in George's position that it was rather an odd proceeding on the part of Mrs. Routh to keep him there at so late an hour with no apparent purpose, and without any expressed expectation of Routh's return; but George seldom troubled himself with reflections upon anybody's conduct, and invariably followed Harriet's lead without thinking about it at all. Recent events had shaken Routh's influence, and changed the young man's views and tastes, but Harriet still occupied her former place in his regard and in his habit of life, which in such cases as his signifies much. With a confidential air she now talked to him, her busy fingers twisting the bracelet as she spoke, her pale face turned to him, but her eyes somewhat averted. She told him that Routh had been surprised and annoyed at his (Dallas) being so long away from town, and had written to him, to tell him that he had been so pressed for money, so worried by duns, and so hampered by the slow proceedings of the company connected with the new speculation, that he had been obliged to go away, and must keep away, until Dallas could let him have one hundred and forty pounds. George was concerned to hear all this, and found it hard to reconcile with the good spirits in which Routh had been when he had seen him last; but he really knew so little of the man's affairs beyond having a general notion that they were hopelessly complicated, and subject to volcanic action of an utterly disconcerting nature, that he regarded his own surprise as unreasonable, and forbore to express it.

"It is of the utmost importance to Stewart to have the money at once," Harriet continued. "You see that, yourself; he told you all in his letter."

"Very extraordinary it should have been lost! Directed to P. O., Amherst, of course? I wish I had got it, Mrs. Routh; I'd have gone at once and sold the bracelet before I came to you at all, and brought the money. But I can do it early in the morning, can't I? I can take it to some good jeweller and get cash for it, and be here by twelve o'clock, so as not to keep Routh a moment longer than I need in suspense. Will a hundred and forty square him for the present, Mrs. Routh? I'm sure to get more for the bracelet—don't you think so?—and of course he can have it all, if he wants it."

"The young man spoke in an eager tone, and the woman listened with a swelling heart. Her full red lip trembled for a passing instant—consideration for—kindness to the only human creature she loved touched Harriet as nothing besides had power to touch her.

"I am sure the bracelet is worth more than that sum," she said; "it is worth more than two hundred pounds, I dare say. But you forget, Mr. Dallas, that you must not be too precipitate in this matter. It is of immense importance to Stewart to have this money, but there are precautions to be taken."

"Precautions, Mrs. Routh! what precautions? The bracelet's my own, isn't it, and principally valuable because there's no bother about selling a thing of the kind?"

She looked at him keenly; she was calculating to what extent she might manage him, how far he would implicitly believe her statements, and rely upon her judgment. His countenance was eminently reassuring, so she went on:

"Certainly the bracelet is your own, and it could be easily sold, were you only to consider yourself, but you have your mother to consider."

"My mother! How? when she has parted with the bracelet on purpose."

"True," said Harriet; "but perhaps you are not aware that diamonds, of anything like the value of these, are as well known, their owners, buyers, and whereabouts, as blood horses, their pedigrees, and purchasers. I think it would be unsafe for you to sell this bracelet in London; you may be sure the diamonds would be known by any jeweller on whose respectability you could sufficiently rely, to sell the jewels to him. It would be very unpleasant, and of course very dangerous to your mother, if the diamonds were known to be those purchased by Mr. Carruthers, and a cautious jeweller thought proper to ask him any questions."

George looked grave and troubled, as Harriet put these objections to his doing as he had proposed, for the immediate relief of Routh, clearly before him. He never for a moment doubted the accuracy of her information, and the soundness of her fears.

"I understand," he said; "but what can I do? I must sell the bracelet to get the money, and sooner or later will make no difference in the risk you speak of; but it may make all the difference to Routh. I can't, I won't delay in this matter; don't ask me, Mrs. Routh. It is very generous of you to think of my risk, but—"

"It is not your risk," she interrupted him by saying, "it is your mother's. If it were your own, I might let you take it, for Stewart's sake"—an indefinable compassion was in the woman's face, an unwonted softness in her blue eyes—"but your mother has done and suffered much for you, and she must be protected, even if Stewart has to lie hidden a day or two longer. You must not do any thing rash. I think I know what would be the best thing for you to do."

"Tell me, Mrs. Routh," said George, who highly appreciated the delicate consideration for

his mother which inspired Harriet's misgivings. "Tell me, and whatever it is, I will do it."

"It is this," said Harriet; "I know there is a large trade in diamonds at Amsterdam, and that the merchants there, chiefly Jews, deal in the loose stones, and are not, in our sense, jewellers. You could dispose of the diamonds there without suspicion or difficulty; it is the common resort of people who have diamonds to sell—London is not. If you would go there at once, you might sell the diamonds, and send the money to Stewart, or rather to me, to an address we would decide upon, without more than the delay of a couple of days. Is there anything to keep you in town?"

"No," said George, "nothing. I could start this minute, as far as any business I've got to do is concerned."

Harriet drew a long breath, and her colour rose.

"I wish you would, Mr. Dallas," she said, earnestly. "I hardly like to urge you, it seems so selfish; and Stewart, if he were here, would make so much lighter of the difficulty he is in than I can bring myself to do, but you don't know how grateful I should be to you if you would."

The pleading earnestness of her tone, the eager entreaty in her eyes, impressed George painfully; he hastened to assure her that he would accede to any request of hers.

"I am so wretched when he is away from me, Mr. Dallas," said Harriet; "I am so lonely and full of dread. Anything not involving you or your mother in risk, which would shorten the time of his absence, would be an unspeakable boon to me."

"Then of course I will go at once, Mrs. Routh," said George. "I will go to-morrow. I am sure you are quite right, and Amsterdam's the place to do the trick at. I wish I could have seen Routh first, for a moment, but as I can't, I can't. Let me see. Amsterdam. There's a boat to Rotterdam by the river, and—oh, by Jove! here's a Bradshaw; let's see when the next goes."

He walked to the little sideboard, and selected the above-named compendium of useful knowledge from a mass of periodicals, circulars, bills, and prospectuses of companies immediately to be brought out, and offering unheard-of advantages to the investors.

The moment his eyes were turned away from her, a fierce impatience betrayed itself in Harriet's face, and as he sat slowly turning over the sibylline leaves, and consulting the incomprehensible and maddening index, she pressed her clasped hands against her knees, as though it were almost impossible to resist the impulse which prompted her to tear the book from his dilatory fingers.

"Here it is," said George, at length, "and uncommonly cheap, too. The Argus for Rotterdam, seven A.M. That's rather early, though, isn't it? To-morrow morning, too, or rather this morning, for it's close upon one now. Let's see when the Argus, or some other boat, goes

next. H'm; not till Thursday at the same hour. That's rather far off."

Harriet was breathing quickly, and her face was quite white, but she sat still and controlled her agony of anxiety. "I have urged him as strongly as I dare," she thought; "fate must do the rest."

Fate did the rest.

"After all, I may as well go at seven in the morning, Mrs. Routh. All my things are packed up already, and it will give me a good start. I might get my business done before Wednesday night, almost, if I'm quick about it; at all events, early the following day."

"You might, indeed," said Harriet, in a faint voice.

"There's one little drawback, though, to that scheme," said Dallas. "I haven't the money. They owe me a trifle at The Mercury, and I shall have to wait till to-morrow and get it, and go by Ostend, the swell route. I can't go without it, that's clear."

Harriet looked at him with a wan blank face, in which there was something of weariness, and under it something of menace, but her tone was quite amiable and obliging as she said:

"I think it is a pity to incur both delay and expense by waiting. I have always a little ready money by me, in case of our having to make a move suddenly, or of an illness, or one of the many contingencies which men never think of, and women never forget. You can have it with pleasure. You can return it to me," she said, with a forced smile, "when you send Routh the hundred and forty."

"Thank you," said Dallas. "I shan't mind taking it from you for a day or two, as it is to send help to Routh the sooner. Then I'll go, that's settled, and I had better leave you, for you were tired when I came in, and you must be still more tired now. I shall get back from Amsterdam as quickly as I can, tell Routh, but I see my way to making a few pounds out of the place. They want padding at The Mercury, and I shan't come back by return of post." He had risen now, and had extended his hand towards the bracelet, which lay in its open case on the table.

A sudden thought struck Harriet.

"Stop," she said; "I don't think it would do to offer this bracelet in its present shape, anywhere. The form and the setting are too remarkable. It would probably be re-sold entire, and it is impossible to say what harm might come of its being recognised. It must be taken to pieces, and you must offer the diamonds separately for sale. It will make no appreciable difference in the money you will receive, for such work as this is like bookbinding—dear to buy, but never counted in the price when you want to sell."

"What am I to do, then?" asked George, in a dismayed tone. "I could not take out the diamonds, you know; they are firmly set—see here." He turned the gold band inside out, and showed her the plain flat surface at the back of the diamonds and turquoises.

"Wait a moment," said Harriet. "I think I can assist you in this respect. Do you study the bracelet a bit until I come to you."

She left the room, and remained away for a little time. Dallas stood close by the table, having lowered the gas-burners, and by their light he closely inspected the rivets, the fastenings, and the general form of the splendid ornament he was so anxious to get rid of, idly thinking how well it must have looked on his mother's still beautiful arm, and wondering whether she was likely soon to be obliged to wear the counterfeit. His back was turned to the door by which Harriet had left the room, so that, when she came softly to the aperture again, he did not perceive her. She carefully noted his attitude, and glided softly in, carrying several small implements in her right hand, and in her left held cautiously behind her back a coat, which she dexterously dropped upon the floor quite unperceived by Dallas, behind the chair on which he had thrown his. She then went up to the table, and showed him a small pair of nippers, a pair of scissors of peculiar form, and a little implement, with which she told him workers in jewellery loosened stones in their setting, and punched them out. Dallas looked with some surprise at the collection, regarding them as unusual items of a lady's paraphernalia, and said, gaily:

"You are truly a woman of resources, Mrs. Routh. Who would ever have thought of your having all those things ready at a moment's notice?"

Harriet made no reply, but she could not quite conceal the disconcerting effect of his words.

"If I have made a blunder in this," she thought, "it is a serious one, but I have more to do, and must not think yet."

She sat down, cleared a space on the table, placed the bracelet and the little tools before her, and set to work at once at her task of demolition. It was a long one, and the sight was pitiful as she placed jewel after jewel carefully in a small box before her, and proceeded to loosen one after another. Sometimes George took the bracelet from her and aided her, but the greater part of the work was done by her. The face bent over the disfigured gold and maltreated gems was a remarkable one in its mingled expression of intentness and absence; her will was animating her fingers in their task, but her mind, her fancy, her memory, were away, and, to judge by the rigidity of the cheeks and lips, the unrelaxed tension of the low white brow, on no pleasing excursion. The pair worked on in silence, only broken occasionally by a word from George, expressive of admiration for her dexterity and the celerity with which she detached the jewels from the gold setting. At length all was done—the golden band, limp and scratched, was a mere common-place piece of goldsmith's work—the diamonds lay in their box in a shining heap, the discarded turquoises on the table; all was done.

"What shall we do with these things?" asked George. "They are not worth selling—

at least, not now—but I think the blue things might make up prettily with the gold again. Will you keep them, Mrs. Routh? and some day, when I am better off, I'll have them set for you, in remembrance of this night in particular, and of all your goodness to me in general."

He was looking at the broken gold and the turquoises, thinking how trumpery they looked now—not at her. Fortunately not at her, for if he had seen her face he must have known—even he, unsuspecting as he was—that she was shaken by some inexplicably powerful feeling. The dark blood rushed into her face, dispersed itself over her fair throat in blotches, and made a sudden dreadful tingling in her ears. For a minute she did not reply, and then Dallas did look at her, but the agony had passed over her.

"No—no," she said; "the gold is valuable, and the turquoises as much so as they can be for their size. You must keep them for a rainy day."

"I'm likely to see many," said George, with half a smile and half a sigh, "but I don't think I'll ever use these things to keep me from the pelting of the pitiless shower. If you won't keep them for yourself, Mrs. Routh, perhaps you'll keep them for me until I return."

"Oh yes," said Harriet, "I will keep them. I will lock them up in my desk; you will know where to find them."

She drew the desk towards her as she spoke, took out of it a piece of paper, without seeing that one side had some writing upon it, swept the scattered turquoises into the sheet, then folded the gold band in a second, placed both in a large blue envelope, with the device of Routh's last new company scheme upon it, and sealed the parcel over the wafer.

"Write your name on it," she said to George, who took up a pen and obeyed her. She opened a drawer at the side of the desk, and put away the little parcel quite at the back. Then she took from the same drawer seven sovereigns, which George said would be as much as he would require for the present, and which he carefully stowed away in his pocket-book. Then he sat down at the desk, and playfully wrote an IOU for the amount.

"That's business-like," said George, smiling, but the smile by which she replied was so wan and weary, that George again commented on her fatigue, and began to take leave of her.

"I'm off, then," he said, "and you won't forget to tell Routh how much I wanted to see him. Among other things to tell him—However, I suppose he has seen Deane since I have been away?"

Harriet was occupied in turning down the gas-burner by which she had just lighted the candle again. She now said:

"How stupid I am! as if I couldn't have lighted you to the door first, and put the gas out afterwards! The truth is, I am so tired; I'm quite stupefied. What did you say, Mr. Dallas? There, I've knocked your coat off the chair; here it is, however. You asked me something, I think?"



George took the coat she held from her, hung it over his arm, felt for his hat (the room being lighted only by the feeble candle), and repeated his words:

"Routh has seen Deane, of course, since I've been away?"

"No," Harriet replied, with distinctness, "he has not—he has not."

"Indeed," said George. "I am surprised at that. But Deane was huffed, I remember, on Thursday, when Routh broke his engagement to dine with him, and said it must depend on whether he was in the humour to meet him the next day, as Routh asked him to do. So I suppose he wasn't in the humour, eh? And now he'll be huffed with me, but I can't help it."

"Why?" asked Harriet; and she spoke the single word with a strange effort, and a painful dryness of the throat.

"Because I promised to give him his revenge at billiards. I won ten pounds from him that night, and uncommonly lucky it was for me; it enabled me to get away from my horrible old shrew of a landlady, and, indeed, indirectly it enables me to start on this business to-morrow."

"How?" said Harriet. Again she spoke but one word, and again with difficulty and a dryness in the throat. She set down the candle, and leaned against the table, while George stood between her and the door, his coat over his arm.

"You didn't notice that I told you I was all packed up and ready to go. It happened luckily, didn't it?" And then George told his listener how he had paid his landlady, and removed his modest belongings on the previous Friday morning to a coffee-house, close to the river, too. "By Jove! I'm in luck's way, it seems," he said; "so I shall merely go and sleep there, and take my traps on board the Argus. I have only such clothes as I shall want, no matter where I am," he said. "They'll keep the trunk with my books until I come back, and Deane must wait for his revenge with the balls and cues for the same auspicious occasion. Let's hope he'll be in a better temper, and have forgiven Routh. He was awfully riled at his note on Thursday evening."

"Did—did you see it?" asked Harriet; and, as she spoke, she leaned still more heavily against the table.

"No," replied Dallas, "I did not; but Deane told me Routh asked him to meet him the next day. He didn't, it seems."

"No," said Harriet; "and Stewart is very much annoyed about it. Mr. Deane owed him money, and he asked him for some in that note."

"Indeed," said George; "he could have paid him, then. I happen to know. He had a lot of gold and notes with him. The tanner he lost to me he paid in a note, and he changed a fiver to pay for our dinner, and he was bragging and bouncing the whole time about the money he had about him, and what he would, and would not, do with it. So it was sheer spite made him neglect to pay Routh, and I hope he'll dun him again. The idea of Routh being

in the hole he's in, and a fellow like that owing him money. How much is it, Mrs. Routh?"

"I—I don't know," said Harriet.

"There, I'm keeping you talking still. I am the most thoughtless fellow." It never occurred to George that she had kept him until she had learned what she wanted to know.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Routh, good-bye."

She had passed him, the candle in her hand, and this farewell was uttered in the hall. He held out his hand; she hesitated for a moment, and then gave him hers. He pressed it fervently; it was deadly cold.

"Don't stay in the chill air," he said; "you are shivering now."

Then he went away with a light cheerful step.

Harriet Routh stood quite still, as he had left her, for one full minute; then she hurried into the sitting-room, shut the door, dropped on her knees before a chair, and ground her face fiercely against her arms. There she knelt, not sobbing, not weeping, but shuddering—shuddering with the quick terrible iteration of mortal agony of spirit, acting on an exhausted frame. After a while she rose, and then her face was dreadful to look upon, in its white fixed despair.

"If I have saved him," she said, as she sat wearily down by the table again, and once more leaned her face upon her hands—"if I have saved him! It may be there is a chance; at all events, there is a chance. How wonderful, how inconceivably wonderful that he should not have heard of it! The very stones of the street seem to cry it out, and he has not heard of it; the very air is full of it, and he knows nothing. If anything should prevent his going? But no; nothing will, nothing *can*. This was the awful danger—this was the certain, the inevitable risk; if I have averted it, if I have saved him, for the time!"

The chill of coming dawn struck cold to her limbs, the sickness of long watching, of fear, and of sleeplessness was at her heart, but Harriet Routh did not lie down on her bed all that dreadful night. Terrible fatigue weighed down her eyelids, and made her flesh tremble and quiver over the aching bones.

"I must not sleep—I should not wake in time," she said, as she forced herself to rise from her chair, and paced the narrow room, when the sudden numbness of sleep threatened to fall upon her. "I have something to do."

Dawn came, then sunrise, then the sounds, the stir of morning. Then Harriet bathed her face in cold water, and looked in her toilet-glass at her haggard features. The image was not reassuring; but she only smiled a bitter smile, and made a mocking gesture with her hand.

"Never any more," she murmured—"never any more."

The morning was cold and raw, but Harriet heeded it not. She glanced out of the window of her bedroom before she left it, wearing her bonnet and shawl, and closely veiled. Then she closed the shutters, locked the door, withdrew the key, and came into the sitting-room. She went to a chair and took up a coat which lay at

the back of it; then she looked round for a moment as if in search of something. Her eye lighted on a small but heavy square of black marble which lay on the writing-table, and served as a paper-press. She then spread the coat on the table, placed the square of marble on it, and rolled it tightly round the heavy centre, folding and pressing the parcel into the smallest possible dimensions. This done, she tied it tightly with a strong cord, and, concealing it under her shawl, went swiftly out of the house. No one saw her issue from the grim, gloomy door—the neighbouring housemaids had not commenced their matutinal task of door-step cleaning, alleviated by gossip—and she went away down the street, completely unobserved. Went away, with her head down, her face hidden, with a quick, steady step and an unfaltering purpose. There were not many wayfarers abroad in the street, and of those she saw none, and was remarked by only one.

Harriet Routh took her way towards the river, and reached Westminster-bridge as the clock in the great tower of the new palace marked half-past six. All was quiet. A few of the laggards of the working classes were straggling across the bridge to their daily toil, a few barges were moving sluggishly upon the muddy water; but there was no stir, no business yet. Harriet lingered when she had reached the centre of the bridge; a figure was just vanishing at the southern end, the northern was clear of people. She leaned over the parapet, and looked down—no boat, no barge was near. Then she dropped the parcel she had carried into the river, and the water closed over it. Without the delay of an instant, she turned and retraced her steps towards home. As she neared South Molton-street, she found several of the shops open, and entering one, she purchased a black marble letter press. It was not precisely similar to that with which she had weighted the parcel, which now lay in the bed of the river; but the difference was trifling, and not to be perceived by the eye of a stranger.

Near the house in which the Rouths occupied apartments there was an archway which formed the entrance to some mews. As she passed this open space, Harriet's glance fell upon the inquisitive countenance of a keen-looking, ragged street boy, who was lying contentedly on his back under the archway, with his arms under his head, and propped upon the kerbstone. A sudden impulse arrested her steps. "Have you no other place to lie than here?" she asked the boy, who jumped up with great alacrity, and stood before her in an attitude almost respectful.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "I have, but I'm here, waiting for an early job."

She gave him a shilling and a smile—not such a smile as she once had to give, but the best that was left her—and went on to the door of the house she lived in. She opened it with a key, and went in.

The boy remained where she had left him, apparently ruminating, and wagging his tousled head sagely.

"Whatever is *she* up to?" he asked of himself, in perplexity. "It's a rum start, as far as I knows on it, and I means to know more. But how is *she* in it? I shan't say nothing till I knows more about that." And then Mr. Jim Swain went his way to a more likely quarter for early jobs.

Fortune favoured Mrs. Routh on that morning. She gained her bedroom unseen and unheard, and having hastily undressed, lay down to rest, if rest would come to her—at least to await in quiet the ordinary hour at which the servant was accustomed to call her. It came, and passed; but Harriet did not rise.

She slept a little when all the world was up and busy—slept until the second delivery of letters brought one for her, which the servant took at once to her room.

The letter was from George Dallas, and contained merely a few lines, written when he was on the point of starting, and posted at the riverside. He apologised to Harriet for a mistake which he had made on the previous night. He had taken up Routh's coat instead of his own, and had not discovered the error until he was on his way to the steamer, and it was too late to repair it. He hoped it would not matter, as he had left his own coat at South Molton-street, and no doubt Routh could wear it, on an occasion.

When Harriet had read this note, she lay back upon her pillow, and fell into a deep sleep, which was broken by Routh's coming into her room early in the afternoon. He looked pale and haggard, and he stood by the bedside in silence. But she—she sat up, and flung her arms round him with a wonderfully good imitation of her former manner, and when she told him all that had passed, her husband caught her to his breast with passionate fondness and gratitude, and declared over and over again that her ready wit and wonderful fortitude had saved him.

Saved him? How, and from what?

END OF BOOK THE FIRST.

## OLD SALISBURY.

THE earliest incident in my life I can remember, is being taken (fifty-five years ago) in my nurse's arms to see a man who had been put in the pillory in the market-place at Salisbury. The great cross-frame of the pillory was moved round slowly, to present a front alternately to each quarter of the compass, from each of which rained showers of bad eggs, cabbage-stumps, and other unconsidered trifles, on the undefended pale face of the poor cowed wretch, who had been put up to be pelted. I remember crying because I had not an egg to throw at the man. Does this not sound like a description of an African town?

At that time, there used to be on certain occasions (not necessarily on fair days) large wooden stages erected in the market-place, with amphitheatrical seats, for the gentry and richer people to watch the athletes and countrymen play single-stick. The blows were nearly all on the head, and the man whose blood first ran

down an inch, lost. The great object was with a quick slicing slash to strip the skin down the left temple.

Guy Fawkes Day was a most turbulent festival, quite a saturnalia for the roughs and the street-boys. No Jews of the middle ages could have more dreaded Christmas Day than our quiet shopkeepers dreaded the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot. The mob came round in the morning to every door, shouting for bundles of fagots for the evening bonfires. The awed shopkeepers began towards dusk to put hurdles before their windows. When the bonfires were lighted (with a tar-barrel or so, if they could be got), the noise began, and the sputter and the hiss of enormous squibs as big as walking-sticks. In the dances and processions round the fire, if any one fell in and then scrambled out a little singed, all the better.

One year, this licence degenerated into a riot. The destruction of stray barn doors for the fire, became alarming; some wild spirits even threw an old gig, whole, upon the flames. This was "heaping it up a *leelle too mountaynous*," even for the stoutest Protestant. The volunteers were called out by beat of drum, as the boys had begun to fire squibs in at the town-hall windows; but the mob intercepted the gallant citizen soldiers before they could muster, and chased them away. Even the drum-major and his cocked-hat were not respected. They drove them back to their shops, torn, tattered, and without their arms. The town was preparing itself for a sack, like Badajoz. The major defended himself with his sword, and getting into a corner, declared, with a terrible oath, that if he was not left alone he would charge them, let what might happen. Eventually some soldiers passing through the town, without their fire-arms, were provided with fowling-pieces; and they charged the mob, and took prisoners many rioters, chiefly boys. The jail being full, and a rescue threatened, the boys were locked up in the great council chamber, and there, with a big blazing fire, a nice time they had of it, singing and uttering fearful slander against the mayor and town council, all night, relating their exploits, and threatening still more fun and mischief in the following year. The next day the ringleaders were fined, and the rest dismissed with tremendous cautions.

One great feature of old Salisbury and its festivals (even its elections, if I remember right) were the morris-dancers—yes, the veritable morris-dancers of the middle ages—such fantastic posture-makers as Ben Jonson has introduced into several of his masques—men who waved napkins in one hand and short sticks in the other, and kept in front of processions, turning round with strange antics as they danced, to face those who followed. Hob-a-Nob, the giant, was also a distinguished personage, and his attendant was a man wearing a sword and carrying a side-drum. On great days, the chief trades had each its allegorical representatives. Bishop Blaize, with mitre and crosier, represented the wool-combers, and there were

painted shepherds and shepherdesses with gilt crooks, carrying lambs in a basket. Nor was the hobby-horse forgotten. He made great play by his curvets and prancings, and effected sudden rushes at quiet timid people in the crowd, snapping at coat-tails and tearing gowns, to the general dismay of the sufferers, and the delight of the youngsters. It was amusing at the close of the day to come at the door of some suburban public-house upon Bishop Blaize with a pipe in his mouth, and on the shepherd and shepherdess who guarded the clothing interest sharing a tankard of ale.

In my youth there was a murder committed near Salisbury that excited a prodigious interest. After a heavy snow-storm, a sailor named Curtis, on the tramp from Portsmouth, came to the Salisbury Infirmary, much bruised and cut, as he said, from blows and wounds received in a fight with footpads from whom he had finally escaped. The man was taken care of, and when he went away, having no money, he left several silver spoons, as some return for the kindness that had been shown him. Certain days after his departure for Portsmouth, the body of an old Jew pedlar, well known in the country, and who had been missed latterly on his accustomed rounds, was found by Reuben Marlow, huntsman to a gentleman in the neighbourhood, as he was looking for a fox's earth. It lay in an old gravel or chalk pit on Hanham Hill, near Dogdean Farm, which stands to the left of the Salisbury and Blandford-road. The huntsman came upon the body, as he was moving about the snow in the underwood, and he called out to his companion, rapping out a grisly oath as he spoke, "By the Lord, Jack, why, here's the Jew!" For the whole country had been talking about the pedlar's disappearance. The Jew's throat, it was found, had been cut, and his pack, which had contained silver plate, especially spoons, had been rifled.

Some shrewd people, putting things together, remembered that the sailor at the infirmary had left spoons in payment, and, moreover, it was discovered that the two men had been seen together. The sailor, however, had the start, and the fleet had already received orders for sailing. There seemed no chance of laying hands on him; but Providence was against him. The same wind that had suddenly melted the snow and disclosed the murdered body, had also delayed the vessel that was to have borne the murderer safely from his pursuers. The man was caught, and the proofs were collected against him from every side. The crime was fully proved. He was hanged, and gibbeted over the pit where the Jew's body had been found. For years, the carcase, scorched by the sun and soaked by the dews, was the terror of travellers by night. At last, some dragoons being quartered near there, the obnoxious gibbet was removed, on the plea that the soldiers' horses rubbed off their bridles against it.

The old workhouse at Fisherton, near Crane Bridge, was in my younger days the scene of a singular ghost story. I remember the old work-

house, with its quadrangle shut in by a thatched mud-wall, within which quadrangle the old women used to sit weaving. A ghost haunted this workhouse during the old French war. At its first appearance it took the ambiguous form of a "roaring jackass." It was first seen by a discharged soldier on tramp, a wild drunken fellow who was supposed to have broken every commandment, and to have many crimes upon his conscience. People had shunned him as of the race of Cain, an outcast doomed to an old age of beggary and wretchedness. The house being unusually full, this fellow had a bed made up for him in a lonely blind hole under the stairs, in some out-of-the-way corner at the end of one of the wards. One morning, when the paupers awoke, they found him shivering with fear and almost paralysed. The stubby hair on his vicious bullet head was standing on end; his grisly scars looked livid with blood that refused to circulate in the congealing veins. The old Peninsular soldier had seen a ghost—had been visited by a spirit, probably an evil one. "What was it? What did it do?" asked a hundred voices. Soldier shaken up, and putting himself together, affirmed the ghost to have come stamping down the ward at midnight on three legs—three hoofish legs; and that then a voice like that of a roaring jackass had come bellowing in at the grating of the blind hole where he slept. Horrible nightmare. Time after time it came. Investigations were made, magistrates sat upon the matter, natural history men discussed the possibility of roaring jackasses; the workhouse, the town, was in an uproar.

All this time an officer of the house kept racking his brains and puzzling his keen wits. Going one evening through the female ward, he observed that the wall which divided the male from the female inmates ran near the soldier's sleeping kennel. Moreover, he noticed that an old woman named Sairey Lane often walked about with a stick, and tapped the wall sometimes as she walked. He watched closer and closer, until he all but established that it was this old woman who had simulated the ghost—that Sairey Lane and no other was the roaring jackass. After much trouble, the old woman confessed that she had come night after night to the grate of the blind hole, and roared and brayed there in order to induce the soldier's conversion. The greater his terror, the more supreme her satisfaction. The only drawback on the roaring jackass was its discovery. Once relieved from that incubus, the soldier, contemptuous henceforward of the supernatural, probably went on ripening for the gallows with tremendous rapidity.

There was another haunted house in Salisbury, in my young days—a large, old-fashioned mansion near the Green Croft, on the old London-road. It had belonged in the time of James the First to wicked Lord Audley, that infamous man who perished on the gallows after a life stained by every vice. Old prints still exist representing the James the First people in their bolstered sleeves and hose, and with large ribbon roses on their shoes, as the fashion then was, witnessing Lord Audley's death. The house afterwards belonged

to Sir Giles Estcourt, then to the Wyndhams, and lastly, if I remember right, it was turned into an ecclesiastical college. The first time I was shown the place (as a child), there was, I remember, a three-cocked-hat hanging up in one of the windows, and I attached a mysterious importance to this accidental circumstance, surmising it, of course, to be Lord Audley's hat, and no one else's. The ghost story ran, that on one occasion, when the wicked owner of the house sat revelling and gambling on a Sunday, blaspheming God and cursing man, a strange black dog, like the dog in the Isle of Man mythology, appeared, with supernatural concomitants, entering and departing suddenly and unaccountably. From that moment the cards turned against the blasphemer, the dice fell amiss. With every card down went oak woods, farm-houses, and country mansions; his luck never changed; the sinner lost in that one black-dog evening, his whole estates.

In my younger days, people had more character than they have now. They rejoiced in their own eccentricities and peculiarities, regardless of any one. The great lion of our neighbourhood was that dark and mysterious man, Beckford, the author of "Vathek." Beckford, when he came of age after a long minority, had a million of ready money, and one hundred thousand and five pounds a year. The Earl of Chatham was a visitor at his mother's house, William Pitt was his playmate. He was educated as a prince should be educated. Mozart taught him music, Cozens painting; Sir William Chambers, the builder of Somerset House, architecture. He learned the chief European and Oriental languages; he made the grand tour as a monarch might make it; he saw all the great celebrities of Europe; he mixed in the highest society at every court. He returned home, but dark rumours began to blight his name. He flew to Portugal, and there lived a life of shameless luxury. He returned a forlorn misanthrope, and lived unseen by any, shut up within his own park wall, and shunned by his neighbours.

Whenever this strange person went to London, he used to drive through Salisbury with four horses at a furious pace, to express his contempt and hatred for the town and its inhabitants. There are many persons still living near Salisbury who remember hearing the great tower that Beckford built, falling. The only person hurt was a carpenter, who, putting up a looking-glass at the time, was struck off his ladder by the tremendous rush of air.

In those days, Salisbury abounded in eccentric people. There was Reed the artist: a wild-eyed, long-haired man, who used to race through the streets like a flying Mercury, on his way to the schools where he taught drawing. The great Goethe had mentioned his etchings with respect. He used to have visions, and believed thoroughly in his own genius. His celebrated picture was one of some flounders—not a popular subject. Reed professed to be a great musician, and used to make most hideous faces during service at the cathedral, to show his uncontrollable admiration of certain passages in the anthems.



Then there was Dr. Patrick, whom I have always retained in my mind as a permanent type of ingratitude. The doctor secured a legacy of five hundred pounds from Lady Wallington, entirely by bringing macaroons (when-ever he came on a visit) to her dog Bouncer. When the old lady died, she left the doctor Bouncer and five hundred pounds. A week afterwards, however, the ungrateful doctor sold Bouncer to a blacksmith for three and sixpence.

#### MY CHURCH IN TOWN.

My church in town! It fronts our square,  
With Gothic portals—Scott designer—  
Tall spire, and painted windows rare,  
There's nothing in all London finer.  
A church that's counted "very high,"  
A ritualistic rector owning,  
Who makes a claim to Heaven rely  
On crosses, candles, and intoning.  
And crowds of worshippers come there,  
Who give one morning of the seven  
To treading with exceeding care  
A fashionable road to Heaven—  
Fine ladies who low bending pray,  
And sigh for services in Latin,  
And mortify the flesh each day  
In gleaming robes of silk and satin.  
The curate, "such a dear," you know,  
Airs a white hand to turn his pages;  
I hardly think St. Paul did so,  
When preaching to Athenian sages.  
His doctrine, if it have a fault,  
Stands much in need of force and flavour,  
And makes me think the gospel salt  
Has very nearly lost its savour.  
Where Dives sits, I look in vain  
For Lazarus, even at the portal,  
I wonder, does their creed maintain  
The rich man only is immortal?  
And yet my mind is somewhat eased:  
So vain and vapid is the preaching,  
That Lazarus hardly would be pleased  
To gather fragments of such teaching.  
It would be worthier of the times,  
And talk of charitable graces,  
If we took care the Sunday chimes  
Should sometimes sound in silent places.  
The brooder'd altar-cloth might tell  
Of pious hands, and yet be plainer:  
A simpler, homelier rite were well,  
So should the poor man be a gainer.

#### THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

THE Hole is within shouting distance of Victoria station, Belgravia, and the Wall is in the midst of the labyrinth of rails leading to and from that mighty maze. Its title and use are as well known in the official railway world as the station itself is to the world of travellers, and from it are issued daily and nightly signals of safety, by means of which the lives of thousands are secured. "There is but one line in, you see, and one out for all the different traffic of this station, and they all join opposite these signals," put the facts of the case in a nutshell, and completely satisfied us as to the meaning of the

strange little private box we were peering into. But let us first walk round Victoria station, commencing at the Grosvenor Hotel, and following the pavement until we turn the corner and gain the booking-offices of the London, Chatham, and Dover Company. It is a goodly distance, and we pass a variety of intending passengers and ticket-places, and, multiplying the space traversed by the number of lines of railway which can be packed into it, we arrive at a proximate estimate of the quantity of trains, engines, "empties," or luggage-vans which may be standing side by side and waiting egress. Excursions to Brighton and the south coast; frequent trains to the Crystal Palace; Metropolitan, Great Western, and London, Chatham, and Dover traffic, make up a stupendous total, the whole of which converges into two single lines opposite the Hole in the Wall. No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately, and who with one telegraph clerk are its sole occupants. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains, a stray engine or two, and a long batch of returning "empties" from the Crystal Palace, reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. It is very like an unfurnished private box at the theatre, into which some of the mechanist's properties have been put by mistake. Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again, a vivid experience of the sensation known as "pins and needles," a half involuntary guarding of the face as if to ward off an impending blow, are the first results of the experiment. For the mechanist's properties are of the most impulsively practicable kind, and bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord, and certainly by agencies which are invisible. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other, as if satisfying the wants of each. Beyond them is a small

wooden desk and an open book, in which from time to time their utterances are recorded, much as if they were oracles whose sayings would be afterwards interpreted by the high priests. Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, the rude chasms formed by the excavators, the premature ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture which racked the limbs of schematics in the bad old times, it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently, the speaking faces of the shut-up cases tingle in unison, and the whole proceedings remind you forcibly of Mr. Home and the false spirit-world.

The Hole in the Waller in charge, whom for brevity's sake we will for the future designate by the last word of his title, knows all about it, and acts promptly; but to the rash people who have ventured into his cave of mystery the whole proceedings are awesome to the last degree. Waller stands in the front of the private box, which is, of course, open to the stage. This stage is the "one line in and one line out," and the heavy iron handles coming inwards from the front of the box are momentarily worked by him in obedience to the shrieking directions of the machinery named. Thus, when the time for starting a train arrives, word is given to Waller, and one of the red iron flaps comes down with the suddenness of a practicable shop-front in a pantomime, and it rests with him to turn a handle and arrange the "points." Thus, too, when a train is arriving, Battersea-bridge signals Waller, who decides whether the coast is clear and it may come in. It is necessary to remember the space we have traversed, and the number of lines of rails it represented, to appreciate the delicacy and care required. Looking down upon the two narrow rails, spreading as they do into divers directions directly they pass the Hole and approach the station, it seemed to our uninformed observation like squeezing several gallons of liquid into a pint measure. Shriek, whiz, bang from the engine, a harsh grating sound from the wheels, a brief spasm of ponderous locomotion which shakes every fibre of our standing ground, and we learn that another and another human cargo of pleasure or health seekers, or trouble-fliers or money-hunters, have passed by. A rapid jerk upwards or downwards of one of the

iron handles, another angry flap from the instrument of torture, substituting the red disc, "Crystal Palace" or "Brighton" "In" for "Out," a slight change of position in Waller, and an equally slight movement from the telegraph clerk, are the only signs within the prison-house. At the end of the long row of iron handles is a chair, evidently placed there to taunt Waller on the impossibility of sitting down; and keeping a fascinated eye on the constantly changing discs opposite, we occupy this with the firm resolve to master the mysteries of railway-signalling, and to become an affiliated member of the Hole in the Wall. The attempt was a farce, and the result a failure. Waller, a good honest fellow, with black and oily hands, what seemed to be a wisp of engineer's "waste" round his neck, a rather grimy face, a keen grey eye, and an expression honest as a child's smile, cast observations to us interjectionally, which he firmly believed to be elucidatory. But they only served to increase the bewilderment the flaps and jerks and loud tingling had brought about; and, beyond realising very keenly that the faintest slip or mistake on his part would have wrought unmitigated disaster, we failed to master a single detail of what we had come specially to see. "You see, it's mostly cross traffic, is this." Bang went one of the cranks, and out came "Metropolitan out waiting," with its wicked red disc face; whereupon bells rang, and Waller worked a handle, "as I was a-sayin'." Now the train itself rushed by, and word came that a train from Brighton was waiting to come in. "Empties" from the Crystal Palace; a shouting game of question and answer with a pointsman, who uplifts both arms, and remains motionless, like the letter V in a charade; several flaps from the malevolent discs, who seem to take unholy pleasure in interruption; a turning of handles affecting the three dial-signals over the lines to the left, which jut out hands and arms obediently; shrill whistles to the right; a constant watchfulness at the speaking-faces behind, occupy Waller for the next five minutes, and make conversation impossible.

"Now you see, sir, that diss (disc), it tells me the Brightin eleven forty-five it's a-waitin' to come out"—bang goes another infernal gong—"but," continues Waller, quite calmly, "I know, don't you see, that there's somethin' in the way"—two strikes on a more musical instrument here, and a rapid jerk upwards of a heavy iron handle by the speaker—"and now it's all right, as they're puttin' another carriage on, and so, as I was sayin', the line's clear and I lets 'em through."

On the instant a train rushes angrily out as if indignant at delay, and I recognise old Jawby nursing his shin in a first-class carriage just as he does in the club-library in town. Ah, Jawby, my good friend, the superiority of my present position makes me view your social shortcomings with gentle pity and toleration. Uplifting your stupid old forefinger and wagging your pendulous old nose, you were, doubtless,

inveighing to your travelling companion against the infamy of a railway company starting a train "three minutes and a half late, sir," just as I hear you inveighing daily against the shameful conduct of the ministry, or the hideous incapacity of foreign statesmen. Your innocence tickles me as I sit here and know that the three minutes you complain of has saved your life. A wrong turn of this handle, *Jawby*, a momentary forgetfulness of the meaning of the red "diss," and you and your belongings would have been scattered broadcast to prose and grumble and improve the world (in words) no more. It is curious, as this truth gains shape and force, to look from the Hole at the ever-changing stage at its feet. Trains succeed each other with strange rapidity—"a little extra traffic to-day, you know, sir, bein' Saturday and the Crystal Palace"—and as each compartment gives you a compact section of human life, with its hopes, fears, pleasures, and cares, you come to regard *Waller's* potentiality for good or evil as something unnatural. Suppose he were to go suddenly mad? Suppose the many irons entered into his soul, and he vowed hostility to his race? Suppose he had intermittent bouts of absence of mind? Suppose he had a fit? Suppose he became muddled by the constant succession of whistles, bangs, and shrieks which have had such a pitiable effect on you?—and to all these questions he makes unconscious answer in his brisk alertness and ever-watchful eye. The stage-box smile gains force from the demeanour of some of the people in the trains. As your first tremors wear off, and you become more hardened to the maniacal working of the practicable harrow in your front, you regard the carriages more closely and with some curious optical effects. Nothing like full speed is attained by the time the Hole is gained, and as the various passengers flit past, they seem like the phantasmagoria of a magic lantern when the slides follow each other rapidly, but not without each figure being firmly impressed upon the retina. Thus, the billing and cooing of a young man in a white waistcoat and blue spangled necktie with a rosy damsel in a buff muslin suit was very apparent. The red hand of the young man against the dull yellow of his beloved's waist was a study for an artist of the pre-Raphaelite school, who might have done wonders with the black circlet on the finger-nails and the amorously wooden expression of the tawin. There were some fine studies, too, of babies' heads in the act of taking the oldest form of nutriment, while, without reckoning *Jawby*, there were some "old men eloquent," who would have looked marvellously well on signboards. It seemed a new view of one's fellow-creatures to see them as animated half-lengths, and, as shoal after shoal flitted by, the ease with which they might be immolated recurred again and again with terrible suggestiveness. One felt to look down upon them figuratively as well as literally, when the touch of one of the instruments at our hand

could consign them to immediate destruction; and, dreadful as the confession may seem, the speculation as to which of them would suffer most, and how easily they could be all brought to nought, gained deeper and deeper hold as the trains rolled out. I cannot analyse, and, of course, do not attempt to justify this feeling. It is humiliating enough to acknowledge it, but it is certain that a morbid and an increasing longing to try the experiment of turning a wrong handle and bringing two full trains into collision was the first warning given-me of the strain on the nerves produced by the noises and signals described. Puppets in toy-boxes, some well-bedecked, pretty, and glossy, others seamed, shabby, and worn by much use, all playthings of the hour; such was the impression conveyed by the well-laden trains and their cargoes as they rushed madly out and in, in obedience to the hidden springs we touched.

"I didn't let this Chatham and Dover in afore, sir, which it signalled twice, because if I had it would ha' cut them Crystal Palaces in two," was honest *Waller's* comment, as one train went slowly by, the guard of which nodded to us as to old acquaintance.

"What's coming now?" called a porter from below, who broke through the rule otherwise observed during our stay, of signalling without speech.

"Only Empties."

"Blessed if it ain't Jack Reece, with the carriages as went down to the Palace this morning."

And Mr. Reece, an engine-driver of scorbutic habit, and with an inflamed nose, was permitted to pass slowly in with his convoy. The locomotives of the different companies grew upon us like old friends, as their distinctive marks were mastered and they were introduced by *Waller*. The situation of what he continued to call their "diss" determined their ownership. A plain white circle on the chimney or boiler, or a white circle picked out with black, similarly placed, were the identifying marks; and it required but a slight sketch of fancy to endow them with life. They certainly seemed to have more will and power than the poor puppet-heads grinning and gesticulating in the cells forming a portion of their flexible tail; and we at last came to regard the noisy puffing snorters as proud-spirited genii, whose humours must be studied under fearful penalties. In the brief lulls, we questioned our companion concerning his mode and time of work, and other matters.

"Yes, sir, it do require a man to be mindful as to what he's a-doing of—there ain't no doubt o' that, and, as I said to the superintendent the other day, a signalman must be allers right"—*Waller* smiled here not without a touch of bitterness—"allers right he must be, let who will be wrong, and that's where it is. No, sir, I don't make no complaint of the hours, which is considered moderate—eight hours in the twenty-four, which, as I told you, I came on at sivin thirty, and at one thirty I'm due off.

Sharp work it is, sir, while it lasts, and tirin' to the arms until yer used, as I may say, but we never had nothin' wrong until that affair the other day, which you'll perhaps remember. It was that there rod just in front of us that looks new like, that did the mischief. No, sir, I worn't on duty myself at the time, and the man that was ain't been here since—has been discharged, I believe. Yes, sir, it seems a little strict, but it ain't for me to judge, of course, bein' only a servant; but, as you say, it does seem rather harsh. For he was a careful man, he was—a very careful man. I don't believe he'd ever made a mistake afore—and he's fit for signal-work anywheres, but, you see, they thought he ought to ha' felt by this handle that the point didn't act, and ought to have prevented the train a-comin' in, which one certainly would ha' thought he might, though it ain't for me to judge. No, sir, I shouldn't like to have another man at work with me, and I'm sure it wouldn't answer. You see, a man at signal-work is constantly occipied, and there's allers somethin' for him to do. But if there was two of 'em a-working the same signals, why one would perhaps think the other had hold o' the handles or was a-watching for the diss, and, before he found out his mistake, why we should have a couple o' trains cuttin' each other in two. No, sir, there weren't any passengers killed nor injured, as I've heerd, but I believe one of the porters was bruised and shaken rather bad, and was taken off to the 'orspital. The man turned the handle right enough, just as I turn this; but, instead o' the rod moving as you see that do now, why, bein' broke, it didn't act, and brought on the accident. No, sir, you can't very well sit down, not in the daytime, at least, and you haven't time not scarcely to eat a bit o' food"—and Waller glanced here at a basin wrapped in a pink cotton pocket-handkerchief, and suspended from a nail behind me—"except standing, and while you're at your work. Well, sir, I couldn't say exactly how many trains come in and out of a day, but there's a tidy lot of 'em, and engines and empties as well. First train out, sir, is what we call the workman's train, and leaves at four in the morning. It's a Chatham and Dover, and takes the labourers, and such like, to the works about. Well, you see, it ain't only the men as starts from here, but, bein' a stoppin' train, it picks 'em up at all the stations it passes near. Then, the last train in to Victoria, is a London and Brighton, which is due at fifty-five arter twelve at night, so, you see, there ain't more than three hours, as you may say, when passenger trains ain't runnin', in the twenty-four. Yes, it's pretty much as you see it now through the day, but slacks a little at night. The busiest railway signal-place? Well, it used to be reckoned so, but, what with improvements and alterations, and new lines, there's several now where there's more doin' than this one. Yes, sir, more than every minute or two, as you see, and the train-tables they don't give you but a very poor dear of the number of signals. The traffic

of this station is a good double what you'd find in any train-table, because they don't take in what you may call the station traffic, such as engines, or carriages shunting, or empty trains which is wanted to begin again with when there's a run of specials."

These facts were not given consecutively, but by fits and starts, in the intervals of handles being jerked, or whistles answered, or the flaps of the red "disses" obeyed. Waller had neither peace nor rest, and as the engine-drivers and guards passed by, I discovered that a sharp twist of the head and a peculiar grimace, like that of an unsophisticated dram-drinker when the "nip" is unusually strong, is the settled mode of flying salutation. Only the guards' heads were seen. The glass side of the raised roof of their compartment just allows those in the Hole to see to their shoulders, and as head after head flew by they resembled rotatory toys or a fast phase of the rapidly changing magic-lantern slides. Do what we would, we could not realise the importance of the arrangement, or that the noisy monsters we controlled were charged with precious human lives. Waller was simply a trustworthy, steady skilled labourer, who performed his allotted task without wavering, who followed the mystic instructions it was his life's business to master, and who, in the monotonous discharge of mechanical labours, exercised discretion, watchfulness, and care. But the longer we remained, and the more he endeavoured to explain the signals, the more maddening was the confusion. "There, sir, you see that there arm? Well, that tells me"—(Aside: "Ah, there's the Brighton down")—"tells me, you know"—(Renewed aside: "Crystal Palace a-waitin' now, then")—puff—snort—bang—"tells me that all's clear"—(Aside continued: "Battersea-bridge a-speaking now")—"and then by turnin' this here handle, now you see the diss has altered, which means"—puff, snort, and bang—"as I was a sayin'." And so it went on, until, with repeated thanks, we said we should like to regain the platform, and think over what we had seen and heard.

This was no easy matter, though the distance is not great. We could have made ourselves heard by shouting to the porter, picking his teeth on the wine-hammer at its side, but the monsters were constantly darting out, and it was only after missing several opportunities that the final "Now, sir, you've nice time, if you start directly this next train goes by," was acted upon. A breathless rush, and what seemed a shockingly narrow escape of being run down and mangled, and we are by the toothpicking porter's side, who views us angrily, and asks "wot we're a-doin' of there?" The Hole looks less wonderful now. The trains and engines fly by it as before, but results only are seen, and the mechanism seems perfect. Still the questions arose, and have repeated themselves without a satisfactory answer since. What if the Waller of the time being should suddenly succumb? What if eight hours at a stretch of work, the first eight minutes' contemplation of which had



bewildered me, should be too much for his powers? What, in short, if the system broke down for one minute out of the many hundreds of minutes each man is consecutively employed?

Since the foregoing experience the subject has fascinated me, and I have created opportunities for speculating at other railway stations upon the traffic. I have not yet ascertained which line's "improvements" have made it exceed the Hole's for a rapid succession of trains, but I could point to several which are fully deserving of "honourable mention," if prizes were given for the greatest hazard run. My official friend at Victoria smiled when I said eight hours at a time seemed a long stretch for such arduous and absorbing work, and Waller evidently thought himself well treated in that particular. The maddening signals, too, are doubtless simplicity itself when understood, and it is only their number and variety which make them seem perilous. The mechanism is admirable, the adaptation of means to an end deserving all praise, and the immunity from accident a point upon which those responsible have every right to lay stress. But, let one link in the complex chain of cause and effect fail—let either the human or mechanical gear be out of order for an instant, and it seems certain that the Hole and kindred places on every line of railway in the kingdom would immediately become the scene of a tragedy at which society would stand aghast, and at which we should all cry as with one voice, why was not this matter sifted earlier, and the obvious danger it led up to prevented before?

### THE ALMANACH DE GOTHA.

THERE is consternation in the editor's room at Gotha.

Who has not on his library-table, side by side with Burke and Dodd, that wonderful production, the Almanach de Gotha? It is the history of the genealogy of all the reigning families in Europe, the peerage of Germany. In this volume no illustrious Bug crawls up the tree of a Howard. Everything is pur sang. Hapsburg and Hohenzollern, Wittelsbach and Saxon, ay, down to the reigning Princes of Waldeck Lippe and Detmold and to the Counts of the Holy Roman Empire, all are given in the most accurate manner. The square little volume, with its four portraits of kings, queens, or statesmen, its excellent index, its carefully compiled statistics, its historical references, is a work of no common order. It is published simultaneously in French and German.

Yet, as we have said, there is consternation in the editorial room at Gotha. The Almanach for 1867 was almost ready to be launched forth into the world, when, lo! like the simoon, Prussia sweeps over the north of Germany, and kings and princes are carried away by the blast like so many reeds; even the stalwart tree of Austria has lost many of its branches, blown away by the storm, though the stem still stands firm on its deep-set roots. The hurricane has lulled; the treaty of Prague calms for a time

the troubled elements; diplomacy has done its work! But it is a much easier task to sign a treaty and exchange ratifications than to re-write a compendium like the Almanach de Gotha.

"Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" sang Arndt, and the editor of the Almanach de Gotha is at his wits' end to make it out. Is it Prussian land? Is it Bavarian land? Is it Saxon land? O nein! O nein! "*Das ganze Deutschland muss es seyn!*"

But now comes the dilemma. The whole German Confederation is extinguished, and Frankfort, the seat of the Diet, annexed; consequently the thirty-two states, including the Hanse Towns, must be struck out of the Almanach, and the North German Confederation above the Maine inserted instead. As regards the embryo Confederation of the Southern States, all is chaos. Then Austria has lost Venetia, Denmark has lost the Duchies, and, worst of all, no one knows whether the few remaining ninepins will not be bowled down by the strong arm of a Bismarck or of a Napoleon!

We are careful readers of the Almanach de Gotha; we venerate its pages; we look upon its volumes as so many mortuary tablets in memoriam of departed greatness and disappointed ambition. Death, as Horace tells us, knocks equally at the door of the palace of the king and of the cot of the peasant; but that is the course of nature. That is not the view we take. We believe in Nemesis, who strikes during lifetime. What an array of dethroned kings and princes might be marshalled forth since 1848! Under the head of France, we find in the Almanach of 1849 the Orleans family struck out and the Napoleon dynasty in its place. But such an event is not of a nature to disturb the mind of the editor of the Almanach de Gotha. It is easier to shoot a lion with a single bullet than to exterminate a nest of wasps. Saxony is not yet annexed, and may remain intact in the Almanach of 1867; but Hanover, Nassau, Hesse Cassel, Darmstadt, and others, must all have a pen struck through them, and be added to Prussia. Prussia is like the devil-fish described by Victor Hugo in his *Travailleur de la Mer*. It holds in its strangling grip all the petty princes of Germany. We are in October; the continental arrangements are by no means settled, and the Almanach must appear on the first of January!

We have good reason for saying again, that consternation prevails in the editor's room at Gotha.

### OUR YACHT.

OUR yacht at this moment lies far out in the harbour, in a pleasant grove of masts and rigging formed by some forty or fifty of her sisters. The sea is as blue and glistening as the sea at Genoa, and the harbour stretches out its two long delicate arms of a pale yellow, to gather in all her craft tenderly to herself. It is a fine fresh sea-day, and the whole waste before us is of a rich blue and silver, and the waters

seem to say invitingly, "Come and bathe!" The handsome hill far off makes a graceful boundary for the bay (and our bay is said to be a trifle finer than a certain Bay of Naples), and behind are the snowy chalk-looking lines of houses laid in bands on the hills, and glistening like everything else. There are the low-lying yacht-club houses on the right and left hands, and there is the pier, which stretches out like a long finger, and up to which the great mail steamers come gliding. With such a setting, and on such a day, our yacht looks very respectable indeed, and, so to speak, holds her own. She is not ambitious, being about two and thirty tons burden, and musters a crew of four men, including "a skipper," of whom a word more by-and-by. But speaking with a professional air of skilfulness, let us say that she is a very "handy" size, and has more conveniences and fewer responsibilities than greater craft.

Her decks are as bright and polished as if they were a vast expanse of churn spread out fresh from the most scrupulously kept dairy, and the sail flaps lazily as if it were our yacht's white coat put on in a tropical climate and languidly worn. Her mast glistens in the sun, and looks like a great stick of sugar-barley. Her hull outside is of a close brown chocolate; and her linen, fore and aft, is smooth and spotless. Below, everything is "snug"—a little square chamber like a room in a travelling van, with tiny bedrooms off it, and a tinier kitchen beyond, out of which our cook emerges mysteriously, and always in a bent attitude—a position which we have all learnt to acquire by a sort of instinct, and a rueful experience purchased at the sacrifice of crushed and flattened head-gear.

It is a moment of justifiable pride when we go down the steps of the pier to where our boat lies, and when our own men, with the name of our own yacht, "QUEEN MAY," inscribed in sampler-like letters on their broad chests, are waiting obsequiously. They are our nautical serfs. They reverently take in our cloaks and wraps, and with yet more reverence our ladies; they drop their oars with a professional plash, and pull away with a will. Then comes the getting aboard. Then we go "hauling on our main-sheet," get up our anchor, and one of the pleasantest moments of the whole is when our yacht, after a flap or two to give herself courage, lets herself fall back gracefully into the arms of the wind, and goes off (I hope this is professional) as a young lady would do in a valse. That moment when "her head" comes round and we all "heel over," is also one of the most agreeable. The ladies bivouack about the deck with parasols up and dresses fluttering, dipping their heads by trained instinct, as a matter of course, to avoid the "boom," when the clatter and flapping and patter of feet which make up the operation known as that of "going about," set in.

Getting clear of the harbour, and catching the full fresh gush of breeze and open sea, our sail fills out like a shell. Our skipper is at the

stern: a wonderfully compact, compressed, and Dutch-looking mariner, who, when appealed to about the weather, as he often is, or about the ownership of a passing yacht, or about the distance of the Channel Islands, or about the tide, deliberately consults the sky, then the sea and horizon, and finally the deck of his own vessel, before he will trust himself to reply. Nautical strangers take this slowness to be born of physical infirmity, and repeat these questions testily; but the initiated know him better, and give him time to go through this process.

As a rule, ladies are far better sailors than men. When our yacht gets out of the breeze and begins to swing up and down, like a restive horse under the curb, I notice that gentlemen grow a little pensive, if not silent, looking gloomily up and down the deck; but the spirit of our ladies is excellent, and they long for the breeze that shall blow their hair from under their hats. By-and-by it *does* come; then the QUEEN MAY swings herself over with a sudden lurch, and sweeps through the water stiffly.

Presently the banquet is spread below, on a balanced table, when a heavy blue mariner comes in from the mysterious kitchen, carrying hot potatoes. On that signal, locker-boxes, pigeon-holes, all open, and, being rifled, give up their dead. The good fairies of our yacht touch this and that spring, and forth come wine and salad, and well-embrowned poultry, like the viands in a pantomime feast. The champagne fitly comes up out of the wooden ground, thus happily carrying out the position of a cellar; the mustard lies down peacefully with the bread; the salad-oil sleeps side by side with the cigar. Yet all such elements are refractory and embarrassing, and have to be watched like schoolboys. When our yacht grows frantic and seems to be in liquor—reeling from side to side, staggering, all but falling on her face, a shocking and indecent spectacle—her cabin becomes a great churn, and everything not fixed, is flung about and dashed into chaos. Once, even our select library—whose place of honour is always over the little shelf known as a berth—under the violence of the gale burst its fastenings, and Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Buckle's Civilisation, Maunder's Treasury, and Miss Berry's Diary and Correspondence—all stout and portly volumes of their kind—came down incontinently, and buried the sleeper in a heap of biblical ruins.

The great festival for our bay, and indirectly for our yacht, is, when a regatta comes round. We do not enter her for Cups, not having much confidence in her powers in that direction, though our skipper, after previously consulting sky and sea and the lines of his deck, has hinted oracularly, that from private information he "know'd" she could do it, if she were "put to it." Yet though this seems a just encouragement, we have never ventured to "put her to it;" and we have always given as the reason—not wishing to put our *protégée* to shame—that

she was not "in trim;" that it was too much trouble to get her into trim; that there was no better "sea-boat between this and the Isle of Man" (arbitrarily limiting the area to that district of ocean for no valid reason); finally, adding darkly, that "she could give a good account of the M—sq—to, or the B—nsh—e, or any of their vaunted craft, if *she chose*."

This granite settlement, which glitters in the sun, and looks as snowy as if it were scrubbed and burnished, lies along a pleasant shore, and is a sort of suburb to a great city, from which (some seven miles away, by the railway) the inhabitants are pouring in every moment. The long white winding arms of the harbour, its elbows, its wrists, the tips of its fingers even, are blackened over as with clouds of flies. On the piers, and on the shores, and up the hilly streets that lead to the little sea-town, the people cluster in swarms; they are busy with the "Punches," the shooting for nuts, and the cheap roulette: sure and certain tokens that British festivity has set in. Every spot that can hold a pole, and every stick that can be made to take the likeness of a youth-pole, flutters with streamers and gaudy flags.

We see the men-of-war all over flags, and the platforms of the club-houses all crowded. From our club comes the sound of military music, and at its little piers is a succession of arrivals performed with all nautical state; for the harbour is one vast thoroughfare for boats going and returning among commodores, vice-commodores, and other great men of the sea. It is pleasant to behold the salt of these arriving, with red-capped rowers and white-capped rowers, in yellow boats that are like mirrors with shining varnish, and who come up to the steps with judicious sweep, and whose oars fly into the air at the one moment. Presently comes the man-of-war's long white boat, with its six strong rowers in indigo shirts, and the captain in the stern with his Union Jack apparently growing out of the small of his back at a graceful angle.

Presently come ladies, the sea-captains, who are going round these islands, and who are better sailors, perhaps, than their lords, and who wear a nautical suit—sailor's hat, with a blue ribbon and anchor, and a kind of roomy serge pea-jacket—not yet, however, those other roomy "things" that Jack also wears, but there is no knowing what may be yet ordained.

Our club, which is assumed to be an universal nautical host on this occasion, does the briny honours with great effect. Every commodore and vice-commodore, every yacht captain, is bidden. We swarm over again and again with very theatrical-looking seamen, with loud quarter-deck voices, and much blotched with gold buttons. But everything is pleasant and very welcome; especially that lounging for hours on the galleries and balconies, and, more especially still, the banquet, which sets in at about four of the clock, and which is given in the "cool grots" of our boat-house below, transformed into quite gaudy regions by flags and calico. Those two

enchanters can do wonders. Gradually the sun goes down, and the cool stillness of evening steals on. Now the huge mail-packet, with four great chimneys, drifts in; gliding among the smaller boats in a placid good-natured way, as who should say, "Easy, my little boys; don't be afraid, I shan't hurt or tread on you!" and lets down its London passengers—men of business and strangers—who rub their eyes, and wonder is this the normal state of the natives they are coming among? Everything is dreamy, tranquil, and pleasant.

By-and-by, when the commodore has fired his evening gun, and every flag in harbour comes sliding down, the cool greys come gradually on, and the colder darkness. Then lights begin to twinkle here and there, and afar off are seen the full white sails of the winning yachts, bending as they come in, and seeming to make low curtsies. The sea glistens and drips like melting glass. The lights glimmer, and get reflected in a thousand timid ripples. There is an air of languid fatigue over everything. But our club is all ablaze with light; and, looking from the pier over the heads of the crowd at its windows, strained as wide open as they can bear, can be seen many heads moving up and down, and many muslin backs reposing, while the sound of the loud excellent string band further proclaims that high festival is raging.

Through the bluish darkness, lights begin to twinkle everywhere, from the greater light at the entrance of the harbour, which at fixed intervals becomes unseen and then turns its "bull's-eye" on us with a start, like a distant policeman. All between is liberally sprinkled with soft dots of lights, which expand into perfect lanterns when coming through the cabin tops of the yachts. The whole harbour is alive with boats; for now the night's fun is about to begin, and the fireworks to blaze. Every deck has its crowd of ladies and gentlemen, and echoes with chatter of voices and peals of laughter. The harbour is a great noisy highway. Now, do the men-of-war begin with a hiss and a roar to burst out into lines of blue light, and every line and rope seems lighted up with gigantic lucifer-matches. Then, do all the smaller fry follow suit, and aboard our yacht everybody is turned to profit, and made to stand in a line and hold a port-fire over the bulwarks, with the pleasing effect of dropping molten blue blazes into the water. Then, comes the professional display of fireworks from the shore; the roaring rockets, the catherine wheels sputtering and blowing, as if they were in a passion, and the set pieces. Now does every yacht let off her own private rockets, discharging them artfully so as to let the sticks fall among "friends" on the deck of a neighbouring yacht. And as the water is all but covered with overloading boats creeping in and out and anywhere, a more exquisite diversion is found in letting the sticks fall into the centre of a packed crowd, from which

arise screams of delighted terror and uproarious laughter. Altogether an Italian night, and worth looking back to.

### A MERE SCRATCH.

#### IN EIGHT CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

THE time occupied in the ride home had wrought no change in George's resolution; but it had shown him sufficient of the danger and perplexity of the course he had determined on, to suggest some slight cautionary measure. He resolved, therefore, to proceed, without halting, straight to his own dwelling, where, admitted as usual by one of the male domestics, he would retire to his chamber or study, and enjoy a season of reflection, with the consolation, at all events, of being in a position still to exercise some liberty of choice. The idea of present security was thus yet dominant in George's mind, when the door at length opened.

"You have not hurried yourself, I hope," he began. But the fatal words were still on his lips, when George became conscious that he was standing face to face with his portly cook!

The young man literally staggered, as if he had received a blow, and his face became deadly white. Collecting himself, however, he gave his horse to a groom, who came running up, and entered the house.

Mrs. Turnover, executing an apologetic bob, or curtsy, was beating a hasty retreat, when her master's voice recalled her.

"Mrs.—Mrs. Turnover, come with me a moment."

He went into a side apartment, and sat down. His agitated face alarmed the cook.

"You're ill, I'm afeard, Sir George. Shall I make you anything? Cup o' tea: little drop o' sperrets?"

"Nothing. Sit down, if you please."

"Sir!"

"Sit down."

Mrs. Turnover obeyed.

"Tur—Mrs. Turnover, by-the-by, what is your other name? I forget," said her master.

"Barbary Hann, sir."

"Barbara Ann," his voice trembled.

"Sir!" said the good lady, getting more and more uneasy.

"Barbara" (Mrs. Turnover started), "don't be surprised or annoyed at what you are about to hear."

"Certingly, Sir George," said the cook, getting up to curtsy, and subsiding again. "'Ow-er, if 'tis about the butter, I've—"

"It has no especial reference to butter, or anything of that description," said her young master. "Barbara, I give you warning—"

"Warning, sir!" ejaculated the cook, in consternation. "Whatever 'ave I done?"

"A warning, truly," said her master, with a dismal smile, "but not exactly to—no, Barbara, not to leave me. Listen. I am perfectly serious, perfectly resolved, and I shall presently require of you as serious and as resolved an answer to the perhaps unexpected question I am going to

put to you. Without, at present, entering into fuller explanations, are—are you w—willing, Barbara, to—become—my—wife?"

Mrs. Turnover gave utterance to a slight scream, and leaned back in her chair, which creaked, sympathetically, as though exhorting the sitter to take heart. Her first idea was that Sir George had returned home in that peculiar condition, originally invented by the police, and defined in their reports as "been drinking," that is, while not wholly deserving the jovial adjective "drunk," ripe for any of those little aberrations to which drinking leads. But, remembering his temperate habits, this idea speedily gave place to a worse—namely, that he had gone suddenly mad.

Now, the good cook had both heard and read that the prevailing mode of dealing with lunacy at the present day, involves a pretended coincidence in, and promotion of, any remarkable fancy. Demeaning herself accordingly, Mrs. Turnover, with a coolness and presence of mind that really astonished herself, returned a soothing answer.

"You're werry good, Sir George" (poor creeter!) "and a werry natural thing" (George started) "it were of you to wish for to give me such a nice little surprise. But—but I don't think you're quite your own quiet self this night. There, now, there! Don't, like a hexcellent gentleman, hexcite yourself. P'raps you're a bit flustered like, with riding so sharp home. You feels that, too," continued Mrs. Turnover, in persuasive accents, "and, at this werry individgial moment, I sees you whispurin' to yourself—Barbary's right. I'll lay down for 'alf an hour, and 'ave a cup o' tea, and then enjoy any further conversation comfortably."

"Thank you," replied Sir George. "You're a kind-hearted creature, and you mean well. But, Mrs. Tur—that is, Barbara—understand, I pray, without more words, that I am as sane, as sober, and as heartily in earnest, as ever I was in my life. Come, does that satisfy you?"

"O' course it do, Sir George. Unappy creeters! it's what they all says," added Mrs. Turnover, aside. "Never did I see a saner gentleman than him's a settin' there. In hearnest?—why, o' course you aire. What was poor Turnover's last words, Sir George, when sinking?"

"I don't remember—I never heard," said the baronet, absently. "Words?"

"'Putt every confidence in the sperior sect,' he ses. 'Trust 'em. They knows what they're about, and if they does mislead you, why, they're sometimes werry sorry, which makes,' he ses, 'all square.' Whereas, Sir George, I putts trust in *you*, and werry grateful feels for your kind preference," concluded Mrs. Turnover, rising as she spoke, in the hope of putting an end to the embarrassing conference.

"Listen to me, Turnover," said the young man, gravely. "On the supposition that I am mad, you affect to indulge what seems to you an extraordinary fancy, and to receive it as something perfectly natural; nay, to



be expected! This is nonsense. Having taken the matter in its insane aspect, suppose you try it now in its reasonable one. Granted the step I propose to take is unusual, and may be judged of by the world in a manner not flattering to my self-esteem, there are reasons which outweigh such considerations. I once more distinctly place before you, Barbara Ann Turnover, heretofore my servant, the opportunity of becoming my wife."

"I thought I should ha' dropped," said Mrs. Turnover, subsequently, "when, repeating it so steadfast, as though actually asting the banns, master putt out his hand, kivered with rings, and smiled as sweet as an angel. While I were hesitating and wiping my hand on my apron, he come forrard, impatient, and said: 'Come, my good Barbara, I have giv' you a unfair surprize. Go now, for the present, and think over what I have proposed. I don't require you for to kip it,' he ses, 'anyways secret. You will let me know to-morrow morning—yes, to-morrow—to-morrow—' His voice got choky like, and he sot hisself down again, kivering his white face with his hands. Which I curtseyed," concluded Mrs. Turnover, "and, upset as I were, didn't I go, as fast as ever I walked in my life! But I didn't get no further than the staircase, for theer I simmed to forgit whear I was, and all about it."

George had raised his eyes in time to witness that precipitate movement of retreat Mrs. Turnover has herself described. It recalled so vividly the action of a frightened goose, that he could not repress a bitter smile.

"She will do justice to the name in *one* particular at least!" he muttered.

He was in the act of rising to go to his chamber, when a loud singular sound, such as, if a pony ever uttered an audible laugh, might be produced by that animal, echoed from the staircase, followed by a wail and sobs so unmistakably human, that the young man rushed out to inquire their source, and beheld the poor cook on the upper steps in high hysterics. Before he could summon assistance, the distressful accents had reached other ears, for somebody—it was a young person George had never before seen—came bounding from an adjacent apartment to the rescue. For a second their eyes met. George had only time to note that the face, though somewhat haughty in expression, was of singular beauty, and, further, that a crimson flush mounted, unnecessarily as it seemed, to the stranger's brow, when other help arrived, and the young master of the house discreetly withdrew.

"What noble features! and, by Jove! what a complexion!" was his comment. "That blush alone was perfection. Ah, nature, who can paint like thee? Who is the girl, I wonder? Not of these parts, surely. No servant, I am sure. Perhaps a seamstress of Clara's. Perhaps—"

He fell into a strange reverie, standing so long with one boot off and leaning on a chair, that he positively started when, rousing himself, he looked at his watch. Night was coming on,

a fact of which he was further apprised by the appearance of Mr. Fanshaw, the butler, bringing candles, and a request to know if he would be pleased to take dinner?

Sir George declined the superior meal, but ordered coffee to be brought to his room, and prepared to write. Thereupon Mr. Fanshaw, after a slight and purposeless buzz about the room, and a wistful but stealthy look at his master, withdrew.

George had caught the look in his mirror.

"They all know it, then, by this time!" was his correct conclusion.

When Mr. Fanshaw reappeared with the coffee, George forced himself to inquire for Mrs. Turnover.

Either the good lady anticipated the query, or Mr. Fanshaw was good at improvisation, for he at once replied:

"Mrs. Turnover's duty, Sir George, she 'ave laid down for a few minutes, Sir George, and feels quite charmin', Sir George."

The suitor uttered something between a cough and a groan, and turned steadily to his writing.

He was occupied with one letter full half an hour. The pen travelled swiftly, but the journey was apparently in vain, for at the end of several pages George suddenly stopped, glanced back hastily at what he had written, and tore the whole to atoms.

"To her, to-morrow," he muttered. "To-night, I am distraught. Poor Clara!"

Poor George! may be added. For it is no easy matter to communicate, in an entirely satisfactory manner, to the most attached of sisters (especially if she be the wife of a haughty earl) that you are about to be affianced to your cook.

"It is too late for the post, I suppose?" said George to the butler, who entered at this moment.

"Not if 'tis sent immediately, Sir George," was the reply. "Dawes can take it at once, Sir George; he's at the stable gate now, Sir George, with the dog-cart, Sir George."

"The dog-cart? Why?"

"Going to take Miss Esther, Sir George."

"Who is Miss Esther?"

"Miss Vann, Sir George. Mrs. Turnover's niece, Sir George," said Mr. Fanshaw, promptly.

"Mr. Dawes does not consider it necessary to await my orders, it would seem," said the young baronet, with unwonted tartness. "Be good enough to desire him to put up the dog-cart instantly. I have no letters to-night."

"And, and the young la——, person, Sir George? 'Tis too far for such a girl to walk at night, and all alone, Sir George."

"Who wants her to walk? She can sleep here, if she chooses."

Mr. Fanshaw quitted the room.

"Not badly managed," thought George.

"Two things gained. I must keep down this disposition in my household to treat me as they please. This will be more than ever necessary now. And I shall perhaps also see how the morning roses bloom. How pretty she was!"

The butler reappeared.

"I beg pardon, Sir George, Mrs. Turnover is quite agreeable, Sir George; but Miss Esther herself insists on walking home, Sir George, nor we can't perwent her, Sir George."

"Present my compliments to Miss—what name did you say?—Esther—and request her, as a favour, not to put me to the pain of sending a lady from Gosling Graize, even in a carriage, at this hour of the night, when twenty chambers are at her disposal. Dawes will receive her orders in the morning, at any hour she pleases."

"Yes, Sir George, very good, Sir George," said Mr. Fanshaw, evidently approving the amended message, and went his way.

George thought of Mildred till he went to sleep. A revolution then occurred, and slumber, which has a tyranny of its own, decreed, and somehow contrived, that he should dream of Esther Vann.

#### CHAPTER IV.

IN the mean time, there had been proceeding, in the apartment occupied by Mrs. Mapes, the housekeeper, a grand council, or divan. Stretched upon a couch (for she was, as has been stated, a victim to rheumatism), Mrs. Mapes, excited by the astounding intelligence which had reached her, looked less like an invalid than might have been expected, and took an ample share in the deliberations. Truth to say, these were almost exclusively of a conjectural character, and had reference to the enigma present to every mind, and expressing itself *there*, in the simple terms "how ever master can mean to make such a fool of hisself as *this* comes to!"

The heroine of that eventful day—Mrs. Turnover herself—was seated in a chair of state, close beside the presidential couch, surrounded by her admiring, not to say wondering, friends, while Esther sat apart, pale, sad, bewildered, hardly able to believe that what she saw and heard was not a foolish dream. Compelled to yield to Sir George's proposition, she was content to let it be thought that the restraint put upon her movements had slightly affected her temper, and made her disinclined to take part in the debate.

"And you are *sure*, my dear soul, he ain't mad?" said Mrs. Mapes, affectionately (for she didn't like her), placing her hand on the pudgy paw of Mrs. Turnover.

Some hours, it will be remembered, had now elapsed since Sir George's return, and the observant reader, aware how readily the human mind adapts itself to the most unexpected contingencies, will not be surprised to learn that Mrs. Turnover began to be a little annoyed at the circumstance of everybody at once jumping to the conclusion that nothing short of insanity could explain their master's choice. She therefore replied with a little acerbity, that he might have been mad, for aught she knew; but, at the same time, he evidently know'd well enough what he was a-doing on.

"Don't be angry, my dear creature," said the

mild housekeeper. "*We* don't think it strange, we that know your value, that you should have a handsome offer. But master's seen so little of you, so *very* little, hasn't he? What ever can be his reason?"

"To be sure, he've seen a good deal more of *you*," retorted Mrs. Turnover. "But it don't seem to have made any difference, in a matrimonial pint o' view."

"He might have heard what a hexlent creature you be," said Gertrude, going in betimes for serious flattery.

"It's not a sudding thing," remarked the laundry-maid. "Depend upon it, this has been a long time shimmering in his mind. He wanted to be quite sure of his feelins. It's o-kard, when a man ses slap he loves you, and then finds he don't. That's why master was so long speaking out."

"Well, at all events he done it effectually at last," said Mrs. Turnover, hardly knowing whether the last speech could be taken in a complimentary sense, or not.

"There's no guessin' o' men. They hides their feelins so," said Gertrude, who squinted, had a snub nose, and from whom mankind in general had managed to conceal their feelings most successfully.

"Did you notice any simtims of offection at hodd times, such as when he was a-hording dinner, or paying your wages, and that, ma'am?" inquired Mr. Fanshaw, whose presence in the lady's room was tolerated in consideration of the importance of the occasion, and on condition that he did not sit down. "Come! did he never make no excuse for to squeeze your hand?"

"I—I don't remember as he ever did—no, I am positive he never did," said Mrs. Turnover, after due reflection.

"Or was you ever sittin' by him permiscus anywheres, when he's nudged you, or pinched your helbo?" pursued Mr. Fanshaw, whose ideas of wooing seemed exclusively muscular.

"Never," said the lady.

"P'raps he's heard as you're 'titled to some money!" suggested a voice in the distance. But this spiteful idea was scouted.

"It can't hardly be my figger," said the cook, frankly. "N' more it couldn't be my face, for I'm changed a bit since Turnover first kep company with me at Habbot's Hann. I *weer* pretty then."

"Why, what aire you *now*, ma'am?" put in the unblushing Gertrude. "Look at your heye, and your 'air. I've heard tell it used to be sot upon."

"Law!" said Mr. Fanshaw. "Is that good for the hair?"

"Turnover was as proud as a peacock of my curls, just as if they was his own," said his relict, with a sigh. "His last words to me, huttered just as his voice was failing, was these: 'Barbary,' he ses, 'give me some drops.' We giv' 'em. Then he goes on, 'French is good 'air, specially for middle-aged fronts and puffers. North German makes good working wigs; but Swish is best of all,' he ses. 'I've paid,' he ses, 'graspin' my hand, 'as much as three pound seven, ay, and three pound twelve, for Swish light brown, afore baking. But into anything like

yours, for substance, gosh, and fibre, I never yet did put a comb!—Adoo.”

“Well now, to business,” said Mrs. Mapes. “What shall you say, my dear? Of course, if master’s offer’s serious, you accept it. The only question then is, *is it serious?*”

“Yes, ma’am, it is,” said Mrs. Turnover, resolutely. “Make yourself quite easy as to that. When a gentleman asks you in plain words whether you’ll be his wife, I suppose he means to ask whether his wife you will be.”

Mrs. Mapes admitted that the phrase might be regarded as convertible; but, as a final conjecture, would submit to the general suffrage, whether it were not possible that the young master’s desire to retain permanently near him a person so skilled in her peculiar vocation, was the real motive of his choice.

Mrs. Turnover thought within herself that the object might have been attained on somewhat cheaper conditions; but she made no reply.

“Well, I always fancied there was some one else master fancied,” said the housekeeper.

“You mean—hum—down there, the Haie,” said Mr. Fanshaw, darkly.

Mrs. Mapes nodded. Esther suddenly felt herself becoming interested in the conversation; but it was not pursued in this direction, and, feeling weary, she bade the party good night, reminding them that she had to be stirring early.

“Master’s made a mistake,” said Mr. Fanshaw, in an under tone to the housekeeper, during the little movement caused by Esther’s exit, “and took the wrong mumber of the family!”

Mrs. Mapes smiled, and the council, too much interested in their subject to think of separating at present, returned to the discussion.

“Don’t you feel all in a twitter, ma’am?” inquired Dolly.

Mrs. Turnover responded to the effect that “twitter” time was past, and all she was now conscious of, was a sort of heavy settlin’ down.

It occurred to some of the circle that this state of things would shortly become more applicable to the other party to the projected alliance.

It being now universally assumed that Sir George’s suit was to receive a favourable answer, the next consideration was *how* it should be conveyed; and on this point, Mrs. Turnover, after a little coquetting, frankly avowed herself at fault, and invited co-operation.

“I should do it respectful but cordial,” said Mr. Fanshaw.

Assent, qualified by an unspoken impression that, on such a subject, Mr. Fanshaw should have permitted the ladies to speak first.

“Pop upon him when he leaves his room,” proposed Gertrude. “He’d take it kind.”

“I think I wouldn’t be too forward,” said the housekeeper.

“Send word you couldn’t come for orders about dinner, being that you was hupset,” said Dolly.

“I think I wouldn’t be too backward,” said Mrs. Mapes.

“Meet him promiscus, and say you’ve loved him these twelve long year, and is it come

to *this?*” was the daring counsel of Martha, the kitchen-maid.

“I won’t do nothin’ o’ the sort,” said the honest-hearted cook, indignantly. “Besides, a precious fool you’d make me out to be, spoonin’ on a little boy in fall-down collars! Catch me saying it.”

“You *must* give master his answer, child,” said Mrs. Mapes, in full enjoyment of the difficulty. “Come, now, rouse yourself, and think about what you’re to say.”

“I won’t say nothin’,” said the cook; “I’ll—I’ll write.”

But this craven resolution was received as it deserved, with manifest disfavour. Nevertheless, the lady was firm. She would reply by letter.

“And slip it under his door,” was one suggestion.

“Or pin it on the breakfast ‘am,” was another.

“Or lay it in a hopen tart,” was a third.

It seemed that the idea of sending such a letter in the ordinary way was not to be dreamed of.

“Well, now, about the letter,” said Mrs. Mapes, settling herself comfortably. “I suppose you don’t want any assistance *there*.”

(In other words, “I know we shall have to do it for you; so now for some fun!”)

Mrs. Turnover declared that she would be greatly obliged for any suggestions:

“The last words Turnover ses to me, so as to be understood distinct,” added the good lady, deliberately, was these: “Never, Barbary, never be above hearing advice that’s freely offered. The best of *that* sort generally is, that you needn’t foller it. Adoo!”

Far from being deterred by this last qualification, the council plunged at once into the discussion, and a consultation ensued, in which everybody, except Mr. Fanshaw, took part at the same moment. That gentleman, remarking that the subject was becoming delicate, took his departure.

Numerous were the forms of love-letters aduced as precedents, and many interesting quotations—chiefly, it would seem, derived from valentines—imparted a poetic character to the debate. But none of these exactly hit the point. It is not every day that a young baronet of ancient lineage, aged twenty-five, proposes to his cook, of fifty.

“This will never do,” said the lady-president, getting rather weary of the bootless clamour. “Suppose I write down what each or any one has to propose, and we can correct the letter afterwards.”

The proposition was adopted. Paper and ink were produced, and Mrs. Mapes, whose right hand was fortunately effective, commenced the epistle thus:

“‘Honoured Sir—’”

“I don’t know about ‘honoured,’” said Mrs. Turnover. “Don’t it read distant?”

“I thought we were to *write* the letter first,” said the housekeeper. “Now, then—‘Honoured Sir—’”

"'Being as you wished an immediate answer,'" suggested Gertrude, and stopped, exhausted.

"'To your ansum propojial,'" said Dolly, rushing to the rescue.

"'Made to your umble servant, Barbary Hann Turnover,'" prompted Martha.

"'That'll do capital!'" cried Mrs. Turnover, thinking the letter finished. "Who's got a seal?"

"'I don't think *that* would satisfy anybody,'" said Mrs. Mapes. "Do you accept, or *don't* you?"

"'Which,'" said the lady chiefly interested, making a great effort—"which, if you raily think it's for your 'appiness—"

"'Happiness—yes,'" said the lady-president.

"'Why, *you* know best,'" said the laundry-maid, timidly.

Mrs. Turnover nodded approval.

"Shouldn't you add something about not being fully prepared—you know, unexpected—that sort of thing?" asked the housekeeper.

"'Took by surprize,'" resumed the inexecutable Dolly.

"'In my hapron and all,'" put in Mrs. Turnover.

"'I might have simmed—have simmed,'" said Gertrude, and again collapsed.

"'More cooler,'" suggested Martha.

"'Than suckemstarnes required,'" said the laundry-maid, timidly interrogative.

"'But, for the futur, you shan't—you shan't—have no—no—'" hesitated Dolly.

"'No call to complain,'" said Mrs. Turnover, desperately. "There, that'll do. I signs it."

"'Oh, Mrs. Turnover, ma'am, there's something forgot,'" said Dolly.

"'Forgot?"

"'They usually, so they tells me'" (Dolly blushed), "'sends a lock of 'air.'"

"'Bless my heart, *do* they?" cried the lady.

"'Yes, and yours is so beautiful thick! Let me cut off a bit. There, don't be shy, ma'am,'" said Gertrude, playfully.

"'Well, here, hunderneath, wheer it ain't so grey,'" said Mrs. Turnover, hitching up her cap.

An iron-grey tuft being presently secured and tied—to avoid dangerous contrasts—with white thread.

"'Now, listen,'" said the lady in the chair; "'here's the letter.'" She had made some improvements in the spelling, but retained the sense intact:

"'Honoured Sir. Being as you wished an immediate answer to your handsome proposal made to your humble servant, Barbara Ann Turnover, which, if you really think it's for your happiness, why, *you knows best*. Took by surprize, in my apron and all, I might have seemed more cooler than circumstances required; but, for the future, you shan't have no call to complain.—Yours to command,

"'BARBARA ANN TURNOVER.'"

"Well," concluded Mrs. Mapes, "will it do?"

"I don't like 'honoured sir,'" said Mrs. Turnover, returning to her former criticism. "It reads cold, and besides, ma'am, he *didn't* ask for an immediate answer, nor I never said he did."

"Very good, my dear. I cut that out," said Mrs. Mapes.

"Now she needn't put her name theer, since 'tis signed at the end," remarked Dolly.

"*That's* out," said Mrs. Mapes.

"Now, ain't *this* ralyther queer; 'if you raily thinks it's for your happiness, ansetterer,'" said Gertrude. "O' course it's for his happiness, and o' course he know'd it so to be. 'If' sounds hunbelieving."

"Truly, ma'am," said Mrs. Turnover.

"*That's* out," said the lady with the pen.

"Mrs. Turnover, ma'am," said the laundry-maid, humbly, "I ask for information. Don't it seem as if 'took by surprize' meant to reproge him?"

"Good gracious, child! Reproach! Not for any sake!" exclaimed the lady, much disturbed. "Out with it, please, ma'am, quick!"

"It's out," replied the president. "Now about 'the future'?"

"If I were Mrs. Turnover, little enough I'd promige about *that*," said Dolly, darkly. "Fust you see how he beyaves hisself."

"Perhaps you're right, child," said the cook.

"The very last horrible words poor Tur—"

"There, *that's* out," interrupted Mrs. Mapes, and she laid down the pen.

"Go on, if you please, 'm," said Mrs. Turnover.

"*That's* all."

"Why, bless me! what's gone of the letter?" ejaculated Mrs. Turnover, looking at the document in some dismay.

"There's nothing left but 'yours to command,' the name, and the hair," said Mrs. Mapes.

There was a subdued giggle in the assembly at this unexpected result of their labours, but Mrs. Mapes, who was becoming sleepy, comforted them with the assurance that nothing in the world could be better than what still remained. The hair, and the "yours to command," at once announced that the offer was accepted, and that Mrs. Turnover purposed to be a dutiful spouse.

This appearing satisfactory, thanks were presented to Mrs. Mapes for her "able conduct in the chair," and the council separated to their respective apartments, leaving Gosling Graize under the guardianship of the ever-wakeful ancestors, who frowned and smirked below.

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